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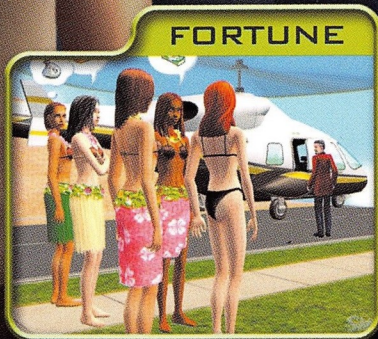


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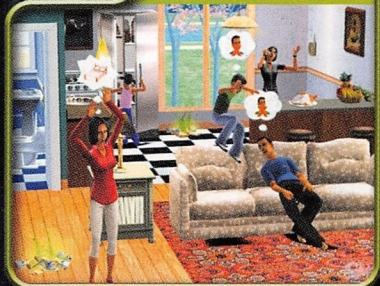
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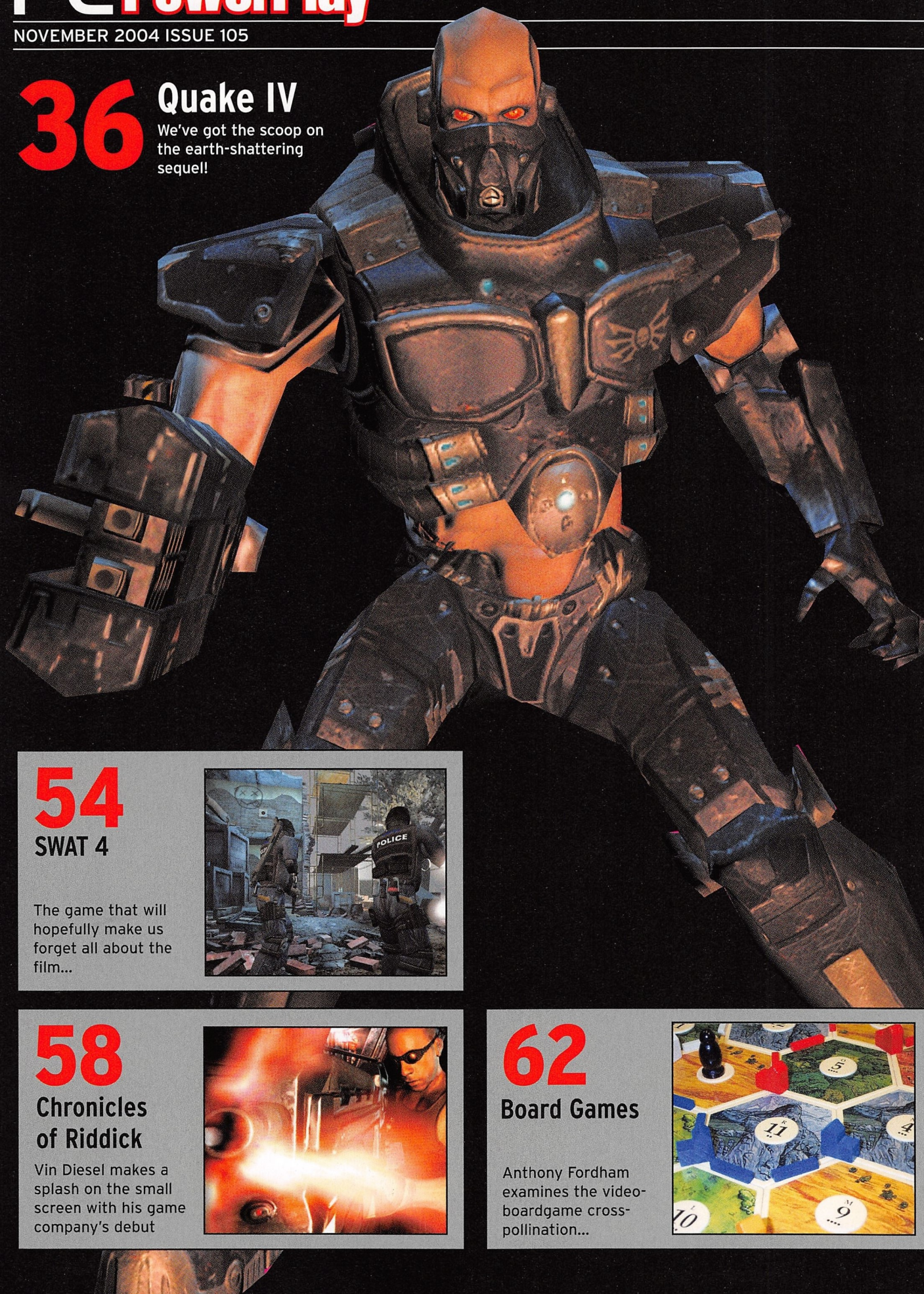
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The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric illustration of a city street at night. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a light grey short-sleeved crop top and dark blue jeans, is shown from the back, looking over her shoulder. She has a tattoo on her lower back. In the distance, a lone figure in a dark suit stands in the middle of the street. The title 'VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE BLOODLINES' is written in a large, stylized, yellow-gold font across the middle. Below the title, the text 'YOUR EMBRACE BEGINS' and 'NOVEMBER 2004' is displayed. At the bottom, there are logos for M15+, PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE, White Wolf Game Studio, Troika Games, Source, and Activision, along with the website 'vampirebloodlines.com' and 'activision.com.au'.

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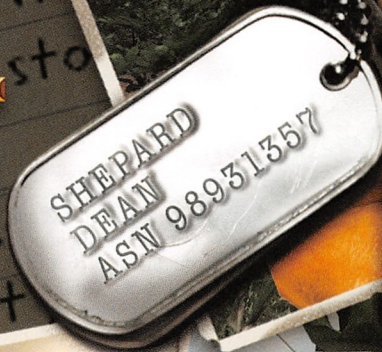
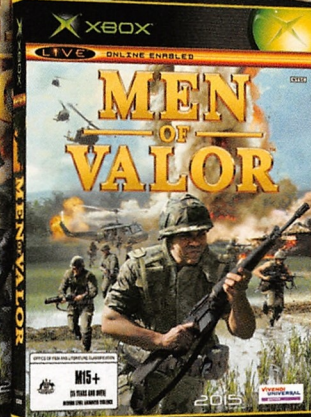
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Now we wait...



First an apology. We had originally intended to review Half Life 2 in this issue. As you have no doubt already realised, we haven't. As the last issue went to print, discussion regarding review code was at an advanced stage between Valve and ourselves. Everything appeared on track, so we ran with our "Half Life 2 - It's Done!" teaser for this issue on page 113.

Unfortunately things weren't quite as on track as we had hoped and we have not yet been able to get our hands on the final game. These things can and do happen in the games industry. Remember that unlike the movie business, where films are wrapped up months - even years - before their theatrical release, there is often little more than a few weeks between when that last line of code is typed up and when a boxed copy of the game hit retail.

But having said that, allow me to tempt fate by boldly predicting that we will definitely, categorically, undoubtedly have a review of Half Life 2 next issue...

Meanwhile, in other high profile first-person shooter franchise news, let's talk about Quake 4 (or QUAKE IV as it is officially known). Is it a coincidence that Activision has chosen now to unveil such an eagerly anticipated game? Is it just chance that the first screenshots appear around the same time as the abovementioned high profile FPS is meant to release?

Of course they aren't the only questions raised by this early sneak peek at Quake 4. Take a look at those first screenshots and read our interview with Raven Software (and Tim Willits) on page 36. Note the pictures showing a small squad of marines adopting almost SWAT style formations. Note the exterior locations featuring a convoy of spaceships strafing ground targets. Note the shot of a guy standing next to what appears to be a tank. A futuristic, all-terrain tank, no less.

Pay particular attention to the following quotes: "...fighting alongside the huge marine invasion force... outdoor landscapes... driving vehicles across the planet surface... you'll eventually become Strogg yourself..."

After the flashback of pure gaming served up with Doom 3, such diversity and breadth of vision is not at all what we were expecting from Quake 4. Sure, the indoor environments look very similar to the UAC base on Mars (albeit with slightly more natural lighting), but in every screen there's at least one tantalising element that makes you quizzically arch an eyebrow and think "Whoa, hang on... what is going on here?"

But of course it's just a tease at this stage. No matter how determined our probing, neither Raven nor id would be drawn on any further details. So for now we're left with the promise of something involving vast battles across an entire planet... Halo with the Doom 3 engine, anyone?

We'll take two, thanks.

David Wildgoose,
Editor

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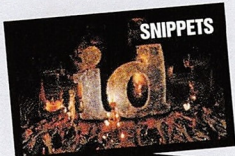


INBOX

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Why not do an id Software special edition of your mag?

Tal Coward
#103 was pretty close.



C'mon guys, bite the bullet and give the first ever 100!

We're saving it for Heist 2.

Neil

I mean third times a charm, right guys?

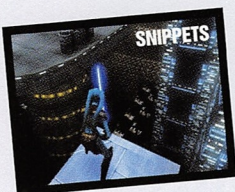
Sorry to shatter your illusions.

Edwin Lee

James Bannan needs to be chastised severely.

He'd only enjoy it.

James M



Stupid Jedi Academy.

Yes indeed.

Djapana Wood



And another so-called happy customer walks away, unaware that in their hands is an object that could shatter his world.

You should get arrested for that.

Daniel Calcei

BROKEN WATER MAINS

I am writing about the way more companies are not releasing demos for their games, or releasing them post-release. I think this is an incredibly stupid move on their behalf. I have owned my PC for two years now and every single game I have bought, I either have the demo or played the game extensively at a mate's place. Sure I have less than ten games, but I played their demos until my fingers were red-raw blistered and bleeding like broken water mains. Aside from reviews and word-of-mouth, game demos are easily the best form of advertising, so why would they neglect that?

Joseph van Mosseveld

And on a related note...

Is it just me or are a higher portion of the demos on the cover discs multiplayer only these days? It seems when I get home my new PC PowerPlay mag I can only play half of the games at best because all the rest require me to be online. As much as I would like to have the money and time to take part in online play I just can't afford it.

Chris O'Connor

Typically a developer won't start work on a demo until after the game has been finished. However, with online games it's generally a good idea to release a "demo" in order to test the net code, play balance and so on. Increasingly you'll see multiplayer demos issued before a game's release, then single-player demos afterwards.



AMBIGUOUS PIECE

I have never written a letter into a magazine before but your review of Perimeter had me jump off the couch. I have one simple request, kill/punish/fire Anthony Fordham, or at least never let him write a review like that again. Shelling out \$100 is a lot of money, and when it comes to reviews saying: "This is a game you will dig or not dig, love or hate, or enjoy or not enjoy", I feel like grabbing said review, eating it and crapping out a better one. Thanks genius, now that I have this ambiguous piece of crap to ponder over, I can now happily wander down to the store and say, "Hey buddy! I would like Perimeter please, why? Because I might or might not like it, according to this review which ironically, due to how it was written, ceases to be a review but a preview thus ruining the whole point of writing it in the first place."

Thanks a lot Mr Fordham, next time I need a confused opinion on a skeptical matter, I'll make sure to check for you in the magazine.

Oh and by the way, you forgot to mention the dog-poor framerate Perimeter gets, it's "refreshingly different" graphics that somehow look like refreshed crap, and oh yes

the different units, everything flies, well that's new! Hurray for that! The other reviewers are on track though, good work.

Hugh Turnbull

Anthony replies: "Perimeter was a tricky one to review because regardless of how good the mechanics of the game are, the concept is so wild and whacky it's very difficult to know just who is likely to enjoy it. The review was an attempt to communicate that Perimeter can't be judged on the normal love/hate scale. As for the framerate, I had no problems with it at all on my machine."

PICKED UP A HAMMER

I sit here in my dark room watching the credits roll at the end of Thief 3 after beating it for the third time. As I place the case back in my alphabetised collection, my head pauses momentarily over the other two games and I begin to sob quietly when remembering the pain I felt when I learnt that Looking Glass was closed. I sit for a while and contemplate what could have caused such a brilliant developer to close its doors forever. Suddenly it hits me: piracy. I could not conceive any other reason why they would go bankrupt other than the pirated games.

Seeing the error of my ways, I grab each and every one of my pirate game CDs and head for the yard. I hastily placed the CDs upon the ground and picked up a hammer. I then proceeded to destroy the evil of the pirated games while weeping at my own folly. The next day I ventured into my local EB, laid down a wad of cash upon the counter and paid full price for all the games I had pirated before walking out feeling free and very much holier than the night before. I have found the light and I hope you shall to, lest we forget Looking Glass Studios.

Slywolf99

You used a hammer? The Builder would be pleased.

PERIODS OF CALM

Of course I had to rush out and buy Doom 3 as soon as it hit the shelves. However after seeing the trailers I knew I was taking a risk, not because of the system requirements, but because of the scare factor. I don't think playing this game can be described as enjoyment in the traditional sense.

I find I have to force myself to play the game, and only in small doses. Tension is essential to shooters but they do need to be broken with periods of calm, otherwise the game just becomes an exercise in feeling tense. I can't deny that this is a brilliant game in most regards but I feel that the fun element that makes good games so enjoyable is missing in this one.

Dom Armstrong

Thanks Dom, makes a refreshing change from people complaining that Doom 3 is too unrealistic.

WHO IS THIS ED GUY?

Ahhhh! About every article you guys write it has something saying "(Snip! - Ed)" Why do you guys keep saying this? Who is this Ed guy!? Whenever I read it I say to myself "remember to write an email asking who this guy is and why they keep blaming all this stuff on him." But now I have remembered so tell me... Please...

Andres Noe

I think we've done this joke before, but... (Snip! - Ed).

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Insight



Counter-Strikes Back

BENNETT RING RETURNS TO THE SOURCE OF HIS ADDICTION...

Hi my name's GunSlinger, and I used to be a Counter-Strike addict. For years I'd spend any spare time, as well as the time I was supposed to be studying, honing my bunny-hopping, head-shot skills with the AK-47. As a result my life turned to ruin. During the depths of this addiction I stooped so low as to become a professional game reviewer. It even got so bad that I started attending – gasp! – organised LANs, where 12 year olds would teach me a lesson in pain.

Four years later and I'm well on the way to recovery, although I'm still a reviewer. I occasionally wake in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, screaming "Enemy Spotted, Need Backup!", but I've left my addiction behind for good. Well, I thought I was cured, until a little thing called CS: Source squirmed its way onto my hard drive, courtesy of the Steam powered pusher-man.

In case you hadn't heard, Counter-Strike: Source is the free multiplayer component of Half Life 2. Actually, if you didn't know this already, you've probably mistakenly picked up PCPP thinking it was Parenting, Children, Pets and Plants, the new lifestyle magazine targeted at young parents. But I digress.

CS: Source is named as such for a blindingly obvious reason – it's simply Counter-Strike ported to Valve's new Source engine. This means that we get the good old CS

gameplay that has destroyed so many gamers' real lives, but now it's running on the glorious new DX9 dish that powers Half Life 2. Well, kind of.

CS: Source evolved almost as a kind of Valve experiment. The company wanted to know how easy it was going to be to port an existing modification to the new Source engine, and chose Counter-Strike as one of the test subjects. Therefore the game doesn't really take advantage of all of the new features of the Source engine, as it wasn't designed specifically to do so. Having said that, CS: Source is still shaping up to be one of the sexiest shooters to yet hit the PC.

The Beta first rolled out to LAN venues that were a part of the Valve Cybercafe program. But it wasn't long before two groups of home users were able to download the Beta and try it from the comfort of their home gaming dens, on PCs that weren't built last century. The first group were owners of Counter-Strike: Condition Zero. Finally these folks had a reason to be happy! The other group were owners of the free Half Life 2 voucher that shipped with ATI cards, until Valve pushed the release date so far back. Somehow one of these vouchers just happened to fall out one of the gazillion video cards PCPP had reviewed. Seriously, we promise we didn't take it out intentionally! ►►

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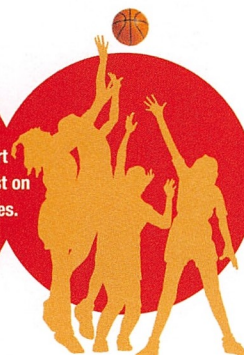
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TEMPERAMENTAL TEMPORAL AA

Temporal anti-aliasing is a new method of jaggle killing found on ATI cards, which doubles the level of anti-aliasing with no performance hit. However, it's necessary for your games to maintain a high framerate for this to work. Unfortunately this seemed to cause a massive performance hit in CS: Source, so it's best to keep it disabled.

A SPECTATOR SPORT

Spectator mode is just one of the areas that have been given a bit of a spit and polish. You can have a transparent map overlay displayed on top of the spectator viewpoint. This shows where all of the players are, and even draws a line to indicate where the player has been over the course of a round. Perfect for analysing team tactics.



Due to the stonkingly fast Steam server located at Internode (www.internode.com.au), and the fact that I'm an Internode user, it took less than 25 minutes for the CS: Source beta to be delivered to me over Steam. It was simply a case of punching in my Half Life 2 key and waiting for the 366MB download to finish.

Before starting the game proper, I had a dig around the various graphics options. As well as the standard model/texture detail and resolution options, a couple of new settings are now present. You can now choose the detail of player shadows, but I couldn't really spot the difference between the two. You can even select whether water will reflect only players or the entire world. But the one I was most intrigued by is the Shader detail option – unfortunately this hasn't yet been enabled. After cranking everything up to stupidly high levels, it was time to jump into a game.

There was no shortage of servers to join, with at least 15 Australian servers up on the first day of the test. The in-game browser worked fine... when it actually showed up on screen. Occasionally a restart of the game was necessary for it to do so.

Entering the command `net_graph 3` at the console brought up a comprehensive engine statistics display, which amongst other things indicates the framerate. Strangely, even though I was averaging over 60fps, the game felt very jerky. After having a tinker under the hood the problem was solved by disabling mouse smoothing. I also lowered the resolution to 1280 x 1024, but kept all settings maxed, including 4XAA and 16XAF. This gave me a consistent 60fps, running on a RADEON X800XT Platinum Edition coupled with an Athlon 64 3400+.

Even though it's been a few years since I last fired up CS, it all came flooding back as soon as I entered `de_dust` (which is the only map included with the Beta). The gameplay is identical, with two minor tweaks. Bunny hopping is no longer possible, as a slight pause has been introduced when you land after a jump. Hooray! The reticle system is also a little different, with the crosshairs taking longer to return to their closed position after firing your gun. This makes it slightly trickier to figure out where to aim after a particularly lengthy burst of gunfire.

But where the game has really changed is the way it looks. Wow. Even though some of the environment textures are a little low-res and repetitive, Counter-Strike still looks better than ever. All of the players seem more

detailed, and the gun models have improved out of sight, equalling even the detailed creations of Raven Shield. They're still modelled incorrectly though, with the ejection port on the wrong side. Beams of sunlight now shine through windows in the central aboveground choke-point, with motes of dust tumbling through these illuminated shafts of light. The ground in the above ground tunnel also has a slightly reflective surface, while bullet impacts have improved out of sight. Copious amounts of dust and debris are ejected whenever a bullet

Full rag dolling for player corpses is easily the most realistic yet seen

hits the wall, making it even more apparent just how much damage one of these bullets will do to your character's soft skin.

The animations are stunning, although some have complained that they're not up to the same standards as CS 1.6, but I was most impressed. The characters actually look like they're running, unlike the fast forward moon walk seen in most other shooters.

The other major change is the introduction of physics. Obviously full rag dolling for player corpses has been implemented, and it's easily the most realistic yet seen in a shooter. Occasionally bodies would pull manoeuvres that a Yoga guru would be proud of, but for the most part they slumped just they should.

There are now dozens of bottles, cans, barrels and tyres just waiting to prove to you how cool the Havoc physics engine can be, although there's a slight pause between the time you shoot the object and the time it goes flying across the map. You can even roll tyres and barrels down slopes, and while it's a purely cosmetic effect, it helps to make the scenery much more believable.

If the Beta is anything to go by, CS: Source is going to keep this genre-making game alive for another few years. Most of the players online seemed to love the new graphics and physics systems, with only a small minority disappointed by the increased system requirements.

If you've got a HL2 voucher or Condition Zero, head over to www.steampowered.com to see just what all the fuss is about.



CHANGING GARD

We were fascinated to discover this month that Toby Gard, the man credited as the creator of Lara Croft, has been appointed as a Senior Designer at Crystal Dynamics. Gard, you may recall, left Core Design after the first Tomb Raider in order to establish his own studio and work on a new creation, the pirate-themed adventure Galleon. Six years later, Galleon has finally shipped and now Gard has jumped ship to Crystal Dynamics and a return to Lara for Tomb Raider 7. Irony, anyone?

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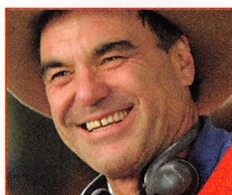


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**ALEX G. CLONE**

The new Oliver Stone celluloid epic based on the exploits of Alexander the Great has been snapped up by Ubisoft for a game translation. An historical RTS in the vein of the Total War series, the aptly titled Alexander, will reportedly ship on the same day as the film's US release this November. However, strategy buffs should be careful not to confuse this with Deep Silver's Alexander the Great, another historical RTS in the vein of the Total War series already in development and, alarmingly, scheduled for a November release.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre

DOOM 3 SHAKES THE FOUNDATIONS OF QUAKECON 2004.
TIMOTHY C. BEST CAPTURES THE FLAG...

Quakecon is an id-sponsored event that is one part insanely large LAN party, one part id showcase and one part idol worship for Doom and Quake devotees. Shadowing the release of Doom 3, this year's gathering was always going to be off the chart. Last year's attendance at the Texas event topped out around 2000; this year more than 5,000 signed on for the adventure. That's a whole lot of LAN. Once into the main rooms punters were met by endless rows of tables, NVIDIA displays, large screens and a sea of gamers' pride-and-joy modded computers.

The kick-off party was hosted by NVIDIA and it seized the opportunity to launch its GeForce 6600. To spice things up the party also featured a speed-building contest where participants had to assemble a PC from a pile of pieces and then boot Windows in the record time. The lucky winner clocked in at 9 and a half minutes (that's with the requirement of at least two screws per component) and took home a complete AMD/NVIDIA system.

The day also featured two sessions looking at modding Doom 3. The big news here is that Doom 3 has a lot of tricks up its sleeves that never got a look in in the game, like the vehicle system. A six-wheel buggy with independent suspension will be a part of a demo that comes with upcoming source code release for mod developers. Out of the 780,000 lines of code that went into Doom 3 about 200,000 to 300,000 will be released.

Day two was the main tournament day, with distractions kept to a minimum. There was a round-table on mod-making featuring Raven's Rick Johnson, id's Robert Duffy, and Hellchick; while "the Kornelia" challenge, that anyone who could beat her in a seven-point Doom 3 Deathmatch would win an Activision T-shirt, was in full swing. According to all reports, male pride was the big loser there.

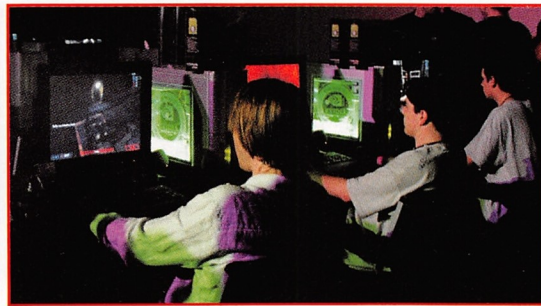
The final day was the money day. There were the tournament finals and a recorded keynote address from John Carmack. The slacker figured that he should be at the birth of his first-born, so fans missed out on a personal appearance. It was long, technical, filled with stuff about shadows and supported by big screens and a light show.

It also touched on the limitations of the current engine (like realistic skin sheens and problems of shadows on organically-curved surfaces) and hinted that the next id game would be a new property that focused on single-player first-person action, and that it wouldn't take four years to come out.

Afterwards, there was a major Q&A session with the rest of kids from id, which revealed that the SDK would be released within weeks of the event, as would the first patch (that probably means around now), that classic id console tweaks were limited in D3 to keep the playing field even and to preserve the feel of the gameplay, that the script for the Doom movie was almost complete but there had been no casting or filming and that the Xbox Doom 3 might not actually make it this year.

On the tournament-side, CZM won the Q3Arena comp, Against All Authority took out the Quake 3 Capture the Flag and professional gamer Fatal1ty took out the Doom 3 prize. The two deathmatch winners took home \$25,000 a piece, while the CTF crown was worth a mere \$20,000. All I can say is that it's a good thing Fatal1ty won one of the big-ticket prizes since the man actually went to the lengths of having his own professional booth babes at the event. Hey, it's only excessive if you lose.

Quakecon ended with a live performance from Tweaker (creators of the Doom 3 theme) and a lot of gamers staggering out of the halls suffering from a lack of sleep and an excess of energy drinks.



Love Chess

■ Developer: Interstudio ■ Genre: Erotic Strategy ■ URL: <http://www.lovechess.nl/>

Whenever we hear the word "chess" around here our thoughts inevitably turn to things of a hot and sweaty nature - grunts, groans and grappling. Unfortunately the connection between this ancient game and chess is usually lost on most people.

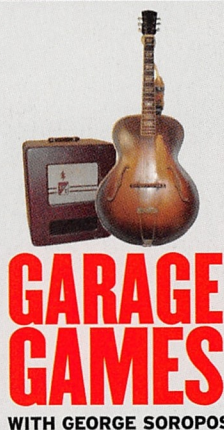
Love Chess uses the imagery and mythology of classical Greece as its visual inspiration and the Karma Sutra as its spiritual inspiration to make a game that is basically the conceptual opposite of the fondly remembered Battle Chess. In Love Chess the battle just takes a slightly different form.

Some know it as 'the congress of the bee', others as 'parking the beef bus in tuna town'. What makes Hans Veestra and Steven Manschot want to explore the previously unplumbed depths of erotic gaming? We asked them. Well we asked Steve, Hans was too busy trying out new 'animations'. We've all seen games like Battle Chess and Archon before but what gave you the idea to do a version of chess with an erotic theme? Last year Hans and I were, just for fun, kicking around various concepts for an erotic game. The one that



appealed the most to us was chess. We liked the weirdness and novelty of the concept, but also the fact that it was a feasible project for us to make within a reasonable time. The Greek theme was an idea from Hans, who is a great admirer of the Classics, and was added later when we sought a setting for the game.

... continued on page 18



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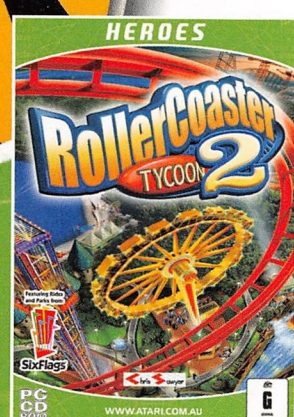
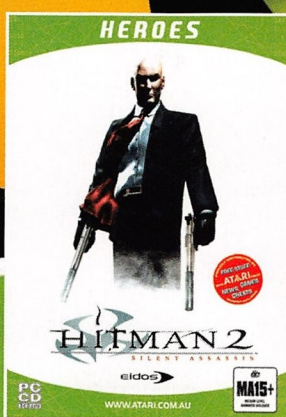
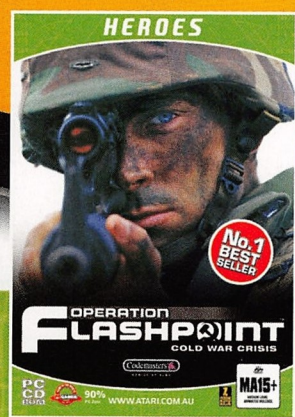
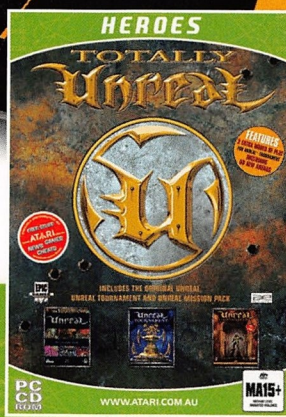
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SLIGHT RETURN

An expansion for Egosoft's underwhelming space sim X2: The Threat is in the works. Cleverly titled X2: The Return, the add-on promises the usual platitudes regarding extending and enhancing the existing gameplay while adding a host of self-evidently exciting features. Of slightly greater interest is the pledge to add some meat to the storyline, but what we're genuinely hopeful of is a thorough streamlining of the original cumbersome interface. That would be nice. Stay tuned for an early 2005 release.

Beyond Unreal

PARIAH PROMISES THE FPS WORLD. TIMOTHY C. BEST GOES INTO EXILE...

After stellar work on Unreal Tournament 2004 Digital Extremes decided it wanted to tackle something that went beyond a multiplayer frag-fest. It wanted something with a story-line, characters with names a parent might give them and intriguing twists ... as well as a multiplayer frag fest. And so Pariah was born.

Digital Extremes founder and creative director James Schmalz says, "It's the integration of everything: Great single player action, great multiplayer action, great vehicles, great story, cool upgradeable weapons, great visuals as well as a few things we haven't yet announced! It's everything you want!"

We're not sure about that, but we do know it has an interesting premise. It begins with a burnt-out military doctor getting a bum assignment: one that interrupts his drinking. He has to escort a sick prisoner from a wasteland prison sector called "Earth" to a hospital to get a virus checked out. Sounds easy enough, and it goes pretty well until their ship crashes and they soon discover it's sabotage.

"So, your immediate goal is to get back to the prison with your infected female prisoner safely in tow," says Schmalz. "Then the layers of the story begin to unfold. Why were you chosen? Who is this prisoner? What is the virus and just what is going on in and around the prison?"

The doctor patient relationship proves interesting: while our doctor shoots, our patient Karina proves amazingly handy with hacking and electronics, and there are whispers of funky virus-driven powers. Schmalz says they're aiming for plenty of variety: "We really hate games where you do the same thing for four hours. We want every battle to be unique, interesting and challenging for the player."

"You might try to sneak up on a group of enemies and take out their medic first. Or lure a group of enemies into another group of enemies who hate each other so they fight each other and not you; it's thinking, strategic attacks and fast action... not just a mindless shooter."

All of this takes a lot of AI work and Schmalz says that while the team had tricks up its sleeve from its previous Unreal work, Pariah takes it up a notch by focusing on group awareness to produce enemies that plan more effectively, co-ordinate attacks better and generally react in more human ways.

Since these guys did pull so much time with various UT titles and are using the engine again you'd expect not only a variety of neat tweaks but some



great multiplayer options. Well, Pariah should deliver on both.

The modifications to the Unreal engine go much further than the AI, improved performance or even pretty graphics effects (including, it must be noted, some of the best water and energy ripples around) and right up to including the Havok physics engine.

"As for the multiplay," says Schmalz, "we have Team Deathmatch and CTF which are old favourites that are now fresh and new because of vehicles and upgradeable weapons."

Weapons run the usual gamut from machine guns and rifles to nasty-looking energy weapons, and they take on new life through these upgrades. These allow players to beef-up their weapons of choice along certain tech trees, with things like new ammo types or sniper scopes as well as allowing you to do things like boost your sprint speed or health.

In the vehicle department there will be both single-player types and team models.

To round things out Digital Extremes also tips its hat to the Battlefield-style of play: "We have also added in Siege and Frontline Assault. The basic idea is to mimic the frontline in a war," he adds. In these modes players have to push the "frontline" of battle back far enough so that it laps over the enemy base and you can destroy the objective and win.

With the monster shooters attracting so much attention we haven't heard much of Pariah, but its intense plot, smoking looks and multiplayer options mean you can expect that to change very quickly.



Love Chess cont...

What did your friends and family say when you told them?

We waited until the game was almost finished before we told our family and friends, so we could show them that the game was actually quite nice and light hearted. The reactions were mixed. Most of the younger folks liked it a lot and didn't seem to be upset in any way by the game. Their reactions followed mostly the same pattern: "Nice music... looks gorgeous...", then after the first move: "Ooo, hahaha...did you make *that*?... (looking warily at my wife)...and did you help?" (She didn't.) The older members of our families appreciated the visuals but weren't thrilled by the sexual parts of the game.

How much time did Lovechess take to develop and is game development a full-time job for you?

Development started in January 2004 with the design of the models and scenery. Programming and animation followed in March and lasted until the end of May. In total we worked at LoveChess for about six months.

How accomplished is the actual chess game engine? What level does it play at on the highest difficulty mode?

The most widely used rating system for chess players and engines is known as the Elo system. My educated guess is it has an Elo of about 1200-1300. Which is easy for a GrandMaster but

nevertheless enough challenge for the average player.

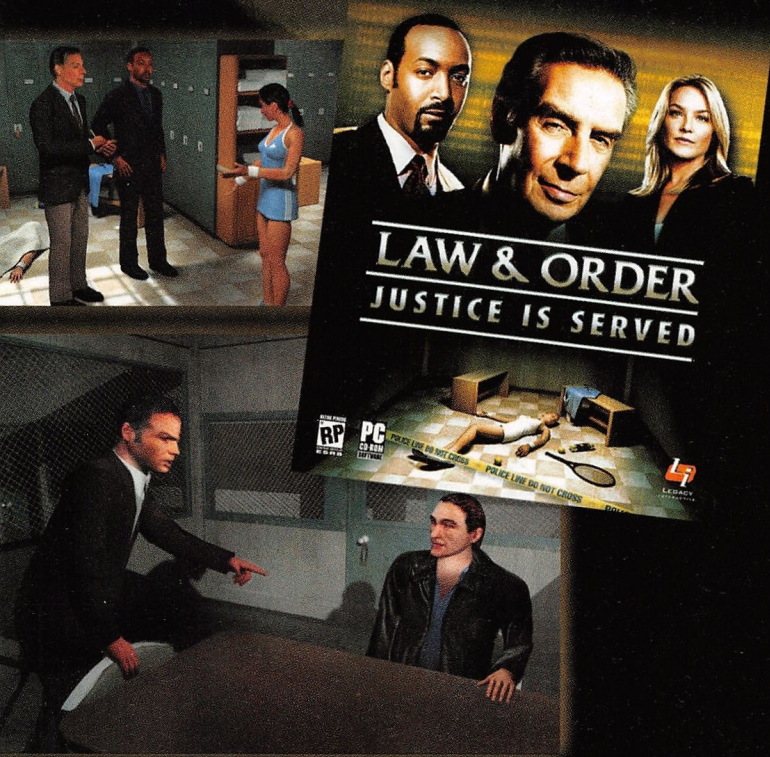
How much 'hands on' research was required for the more exotic animations? Is there a 'casting couch' in the office?

It is impossible to animate without trying out the movement. Only then it is possible to feel and see how the body moves, which muscle groups and bones are affected by the movements. I spent hours with a toy shield and sword moving around the office. Humping up and down on all fours, swaying my hips I must have looked like a total idiot. Sadly there are no DVD type 'extras' in LoveChess showing off Steve's plastic sword style.



GAME, SET, MURDER

LAW & ORDER



She's beautiful, athletic, rich...and she's dead. Elena Kusarova was tennis' beautiful "It Girl" - that is, until she was found dead on the locker room floor the day before the start of the U.S. Open. The 18-year-old tennis prodigy had been developing into...

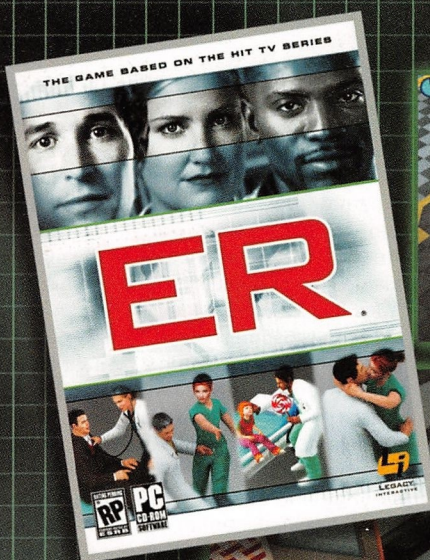
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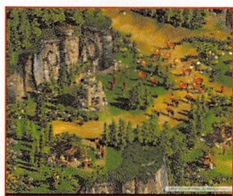
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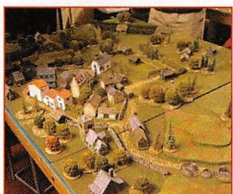


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LOST IN TRANSLATION

GSC Game World, the Ukrainian team slaving away in their radioactive bunker on the free-form first-person shooter *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*: Shadow of Chernobyl, has found the time to launch yet another project, despite their most anticipated title slipping to next year. We know the name - *Heroes of Annihilated Empires* - and we know the genre - real-time strategy - but the details elude us for now. Here's a quote from the press release: "Beginning with a rather ordinary man, you shall walk your path, gathering your followers around, coming through treachery, death of friends and leaving new hope behind." Oh yes.



TOP OF THE TABLE

Coinciding nicely with our feature on the PC/Boardgame cross-over comes this announcement from perennial niche wargame developer, Paradox Entertainment. What announcement? Oh yeah, this one: Paradox has inked a deal to produce digital versions of the *Diplomacy* and *Squad Leader* boardgames from noted table-top publisher Avalon Hill. Atari and Wizards of the Coast will oversee the productions.

Rise of the Machinima

RED VS BLUE IN A CINEMA NEAR YOU? NATHAN COCKS BUYS A CHOC TOP...



Machinima is hardly a new concept. People have been making movies out of gameplay footage for years now. Despite its relatively long history the art itself has never really been the focus of much attention until recently. One of the main sources for this newfound popularity in the genre is a series called *Red vs Blue*.

For those subterranean rock dwellers out there, *Red vs Blue* is a machinima created through the multiplayer features of *Halo* on the Xbox. It tells the story of two opposing armies (the titular red and blue teams) stuck in a box canyon better known to fans of the game as Blood Gulch. Rather than a harrowing dissertation on the horrors of war, *Red vs Blue* is simply a comedic telling of two armies who have no idea what they are doing where they are. With its hysterical dialogue, oddball characters and inventive use of the *Halo* game engine, *Red vs Blue* has become something of a cult phenomenon.

Thanks to the efforts of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne was recently host to both the Australian cinema debut of *Red vs Blue* Season One and the worldwide cinema premier of *Red vs Blue* Season Two. Being held at the ACMI headquarters at Federation Square, your weary reporter (when will I learn not to cover game events after a night at the pub?) made his way to the rather impressively decked out cinemas to catch a first hand glimpse of the popular series on the big screen.

Outside of seeing the series up on the silver screen, the other major draw card for the showing was the attendance of two of the series' creators, Geoff Fink and Gus Sorola (Griff and Simmons respectively), there to lend an air of occasion to the proceedings and

to answer any questions the slavering fans in attendance had to ask.

If the popularity of the series was not evident to me prior to this event it certainly was less than 30 seconds after entering the ACMI doors. The place was packed. Outside the box office were a number of signs politely informing patrons that the shows had sold out long before this day and a throng of anxious punters all waiting around in the hope that there would be someone with a spare ticket to provide. Everywhere I looked there were people parading about in Church and Griff t-shirts while swapping their favourite moments in the series.

When I sat down in my seat to begin the machinima marathon I was somewhat concerned that the episodic nature of the series would not lend itself well to a viewing all in one sitting. There was no need to fear, the series works even better when viewed as a whole. The various plot twists and character changes being much easier to follow when not broken up by weeklong intervals.

Those turning up to gain greater insight into the *Red vs Blue* creative process did not walk away disappointed. The charismatic Geoff and Gus were more than willing to spill the beans on a number of aspects of their jobs, not to mention lamenting the inability of the average Australian to accept that our beer is among the best in the world and that fighting over VB vs Carlton Draught is a pointless exercise.

Red vs Blue season 3 will begin 'screening' on the *Red vs Blue* website sometime in September. So if you haven't experienced the lives of Griff, Sarge, Church, Donut and the rest head on down to www.redvsblue.com to see what all the fuss is about.

INDUSTRY WATCH

With Timothy C. Best

THE GAME CO SHUFFLE

Acclaim looks like might be in There have been some flip flops and turn-arounds on the company front this month. For one, 321 Studios has been sued out of existence after it was found that its software, designed for backing up (should I just say "pirating"?) movie DVDs and games, violated copyright laws by circumventing copyright protection devices. Meanwhile, Artifact Entertainment,

the makers of MMORPG *Horizons*, has filed chapter 11 for bankruptcy protection in the hopes that it can keep up services while it scrambles to pull something out of the hat. A buyout is probably its best hope at the moment.

Talking of buyouts, it looks like Eidos is now in play and EA and THQ are making serious offers, while Ubisoft, who were the front runner for Eidos has reportedly opted to go for the other UK outfit, Codemasters.

Obviously anyone getting Eidos will pick up a bunch of property including *Tomb Raider*, while Codemasters would give Ubisoft's weak sports and racing titles a big shot in the arm. With EA buying out Criterion it seems that this is month for UK's heavy hitters in games development to fall into the hands of foreign ownership. Keeping the big-fish-little-fish theme, Warner Brothers has used its option to purchase the rest of Monolith, which will put the company back under the

control of WB Interactive's Jason Hall, who used to be Monolith's CEO. In other news NCSOFT's Richard Garriott of *Ultima* fame has moved into the position of lead designer for its MMORPG *Tabula Rasa* after three key people left the company. Finally, beleaguered publisher Midway has picked up the rights to publish the next three Unreal games, which is quite a coup, and might be just what it needs to line up some much needed investors.

D-DAY

"London, Tuesday, June 6, 1944: Under command of General Eisenhower, Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France." -- first broadcast communiqué after the start of the Normandy Invasion

And so it begins....



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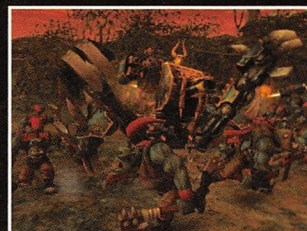
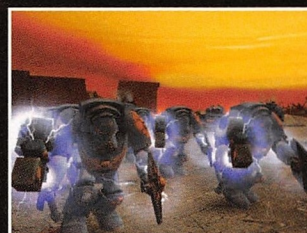
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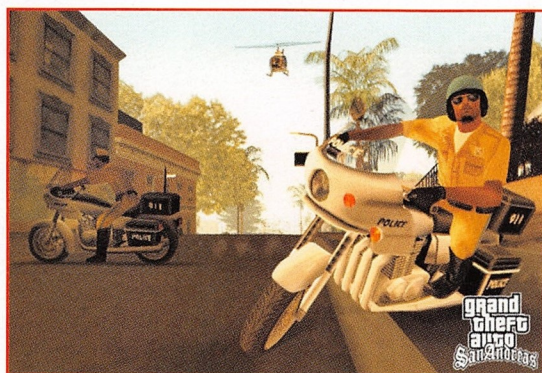


FUTURE WAR ON TERRA

Atari has issued an Act of War upon PC gaming. Cheesy sound bites aside, the clumsily titled Act of War: Direct Action is an alleged "near future, geopolitical techno-thriller" all wrapped up snug in RTS clothing. The press release we have here says the game's fiction (or is it?) is drawn from the writings of Dale Brown, a best-selling author and expert on the US military. It also promises to show us a "frightening and believable reality" as well as a "first look at tomorrow's war" which will apparently take place on the streets of London and San Francisco.

Rendering the Future

ELECTRONIC ARTS BUYS THE RUG DEVS ARE STANDING ON. TIMOTHY C. BEST EXAMINES THE IMPLICATIONS...



Electronic Arts turned more than a few heads when it snapped up small UK outfit Criterion Studios. Word on the street is that the deal cost it \$US48 million, if so it's not very much for the huge impact it could have on the industry.

Criterion is probably best known in gaming circles for its Burnout series of games, but what makes the buyout such a big deal is a little piece of software called RenderWare. Criterion's estimates put its middleware platform and development solution (or game engine plus tools) in about a quarter of the games titles being developed at the moment. That's just insane. We're not talking small potatoes either; it's being used in everything from The Movies to GTA: San Andreas.

EA's purchase puts it in a very interesting position, and the question is just how far it will milk it.

When we asked EA Corporate Communications Senior Manager Trudy Muller why Criterion was so appealing she said that there were three reasons: 1) it's a great developer, 2) it has globally recognised intellectual property and 3) "They have great middleware technology that can be combined with EA's extensive tools and libraries. That will make EA more efficient and is something we also will make accessible to other developers."

Will EA aggressively market this new middle-ware side of their business?

Muller's reply: "We believe that the combination of EA's tools and RenderWare will be a great asset for other developers. That said, the acquisition wasn't dependent on revenue from the middleware technology. We believe that the studio talent and intellectual property are what made Criterion so compatible with EA."

The folks at Criterion say it is business as usual, but with no real monetary interest in it for the parent company, what would motivate EA to keep their commercial version of RenderWare in fighting form, especially if one of their studios needs some special help with the tools?

Some might wonder whether EA would even want to share its toys, but if you think about it, EA has never been one to depend on bleeding edge technology anyway and if there is kick-arse network code in Battlefield or great ball physics in Madden, they would be pretty game or series-specific anyway so they'd stay proprietary anyway.

If we move beyond indifference and into outright shenanigans, it's easy to imagine what grief EA could cause competitors by playing with the quality or the support and of the engine they're using.

I doubt very much that EA would try anything too underhanded; one, because they don't have to, and two, because it would just mean that people would choose a solution that makes them less nervous for their next project.

Beyond that, the previous licensing of RenderWare meant that studios have already paid a flat-fee for the license which kind limits what EA could do without getting sued (as well as meaning that EA isn't in for royalties from rival publishers).

What makes things really interesting is if EA goes the complete other direction and takes the RenderWare product to the next level. That would not only give it a unified next-gen solution, but it would also let them steer the technology ship for everyone else too.

We'll keep you up to date on EA's bid to take over the world as more information comes to hand and, if EA goes after Havok, we'll cover the panic as licensing third-party software gets that much scarier.

BEYOND THE DIGITAL CURTAIN

With Anthony Fordham

THE CHICKENATOR

Homicidal chickens are eating my brain!

PC gaming has a proud tradition of violence against innocent animals. Some of the best selling games in history have revolved around a man and his gun, out in the wilderness, slaughtering furry things.

Of course, all these games have tried to pass themselves off as realistic "hunting sims" but we saw through them. Deep down, they were nothing more than the shooting galleries in Sideshow Alley at the Royal Easter Show. Bonus points for shooting your brother in the ear with the air rifle chained to the front of the booth.

Anyway, The Chickenator embraces its candy-floss origins in a big, Polish-style bear hug. Gaudy graphics abound, in the worlds of Redneck, Shaolin,

Omaha Beach and Mad Scientist's Laboratory (any questions?). You, the bold hunter, have three kinds of gun and a sniper mode to blow the hell out of a bunch of chickens.

Fat chickens, skinny chickens, robo chickens, army chickens, ninja chickens and ultra-stupid chickens all stumble into your sights.

"The game provides few different levels!" cries the developer proudly. And good on them I say. Bad art, no gameplay and few levels. It's like they're holding up a mirror to the state of B-grade game development today.

Don't think The Chickenator is the last you'll see of City Interactive. Oh no. They've got big plans. As they put it: "We'll be braaaaaak..."

WHY THE CHICKENATOR FREAKS ME OUT

- The chickens might actually be completely innocent
- The "Few levels" suggests it's at least a short game
- The Selection of worlds redefines "eclectic"
- The Exhorts player to "kick some chicken asses"



Developer: City Interactive Origin: Poland URL: www.city-interactive.com/chickenator.html

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"Best of E3"

GAMESPY
(Editor's Choice - 2004)

"Best of E3"

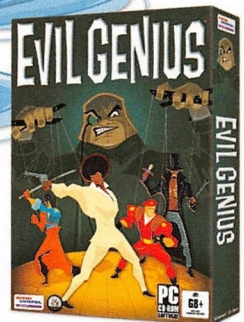
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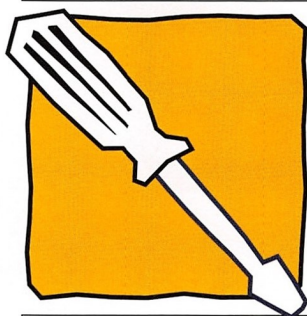
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HOTWARE

All the bits that we cram in at the last moment with Anthony Fordham

SONY CYBERSHOT 8MP

Price: \$1,999 **Distributor:** Sony **Contact:** www.sony.com.au

And then there were 8 megapixel cameras. Sure, this prosumer machine will cost you as much as an entry-level digital SLR such as Canon's EOS300D or Pentax's ist*D, but it has all the funky features you'll find on ordinary consumer digitals. Movies, PictBridge compatibility for printing without a PC, night shot, built-in mic and speaker etc. You've got your 7X optical zoom and your 14X digital zoom (for extra grainy awful shots). There's a bit of in-camera movie editing functionality and naturally, unlike a digital SLR, you get a 'live' preview of the shot on the 1.8 inch colour LCD. Don't be scared by the weird L-shape of the camera, Sony has been using the form factor for several years now and users across the world have pronounced it "okay." So get into it.



USB WIRELESS SECURITY LOCK

Price: \$40 **Distributor:** Think Geek **Contact:** www.thinkgeek.com

Are you sick and tired of tricky family members guessing your password? Then try this amazing wireless USB lock that will make it seem as if your PC recognises you on sight. Move within two metres of the machine, and it unlocks. Back off, and it's secure. Amazing! The transmitter is slightly larger than the CR2032 lithium battery that powers it and can be discreetly worn as keyring, tie-pin, buttonhole or extreme earlobe stretcher (it's what they're wearing on King St, daaaahling). Should you lose the damn thing, a simple 5-level password protection system will get you back inside your precious, precious machine.

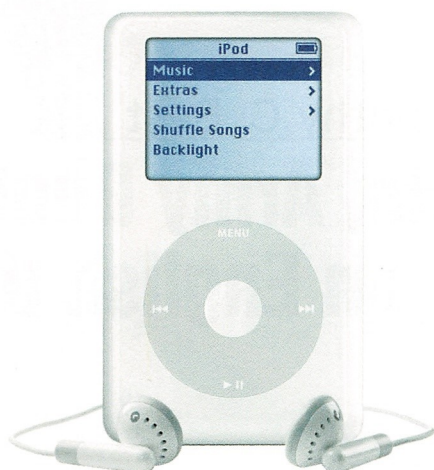


MULTI PURPOSE XGA BOX

Price: \$70 **Distributor:** Lik Sang **Contact:** www.lik-sang.com

If you, like all of us here at PCPP, own a couple of consoles and a really amazing LCD screen that you'd like to be able to play your consoles on just so you can see how crappy console graphics are compared to PC graphics, then this is the product for you. A simple box takes AV input from one side and VGA input from the other. As an added bonus, this box supports higher resolutions for LCD monitors so you can have a look at what HDTV on Xbox would look like if only we could buy the damn HDTV kit here in Australia.





IPOD GENERATION 4

Price: \$495-\$699 **Distributor:** Apple **Contact:** www.ipod.com.au

Another financial year, another iPod generation. I had assumed with 2003's revision that iPod simply could not get any better. The firmware was solid, the design of the button layout was even better than in generation 2. But then came iPod mini, in such demand that Apple simply couldn't meet orders, and its new 'click wheel'. Now the click wheel is on iPod G4 (note Apple doesn't give iPod a pronoun, presumably to make it more 'customer friendly' - to which I say ARSE!). All controls are now

under the touch-sensitive scroll-wheel so there are now even fewer objects breaking the sleek, white lines of this saucy little beast. Plus the prices have dropped too - \$495 for the 20GB version and \$699 for the 40GB. Some pundits suggest that since you don't get a remote or carry case anymore, it's not really a price drop. But given that even if you buy those two accessories at Apple's exorbitant prices, generation 4 is still about \$75 cheaper than generation 3, what's the problem? iPod good.

SLOT PROTECTOR KIT

Price: From \$9.50 **Distributor:** PC Case Gear **Contact:** www.pccasegear.com.au

Here's a humble little product that's also a damn good idea. Since PCs these days all come with two or three spare PCI slots and the wonders of onboard ethernet and onboard sound mean we're never likely to need to use them, it's a constant source of worry (to me at least) that the empty slots will slowly become clogged with dust, goo, cockroach corpses and very occasionally meringue. Enter the Slot Protector kit which comes in various lengths and colours to complement your current insane modding project. You'll also be pleased to learn that there's a fluorescing UV version that glows like crazy under UV lights. After all, as I've said before, isn't that what PC gaming is really about?



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PLASMA MUG

Price: \$35 **Distributor:** Think Geek **Contact:** www.thinkgeek.com

Remember those cool plasma balls they used to have at Questacon? And then, in the late 80s, Australian Geographic started selling them for about \$800 each? And now, you can get them for \$49.95 at the reject shop? Well, the continuing debasement of this wonder of nature has produced this: the plasma mug. It works just the same as a plasma ball - crazy, ghostly trails of plasma follow your fingers as you move them over the surface of the mug. It comes on an electronic coaster which provides the power, although there's no word on whether the plasma still flickers when you pick the mug up. Will this form the centrepiece of the alien device in My Science Project II: Steve Gutenberg's Revenge? Probably not, but who cares! Plasma!

Doom, Army Boots and an English Degree

[illegible]

Timothy C. Best is a senior writer at PC PowerPlay. He's played more games than Baby John Burgess but doesn't look quite as good with a moustache.



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TECH TALK Jason Brown

Thinking inside the box

Every year or so, upgraders get the chance to open a nice fresh motherboard box. Inside they'll find a new slab of improved circuitry, cables, a manual, and possibly even a few recent-ish games to round out the deal. But are we seeing any improvement in the overall packaging as time goes by?

Hardware boxes have changed over the years, from sombre rough-hewn corrugated cardboard capsules, into glossy extreme makeover versions, designed to attract your eye as much as your wallet. This superficial improvement is due to increases in print production technologies, but it certainly suggests that even discerning tech shoppers are subject to glitzy persuasions. An idea supported by the barrage of game and '14 in 1' demo CDs often included to woo those concerned about the quantity of their package.

On a practical note, I appreciate the now almost universal approach of including cables and connectors formerly considered optional by manufacturers. I'm a ViVo fan, have been forever, and I can vouch for how frustrating it is to find the S-Video converter conspicuously absent from your new all-singing, all-dancing video card. And the way these bits are packaged is now more thoughtful too. Like having individual compartments, with separate pockets for CDs, cables, connectors and backing plates. Though ironically, these pockets are more useful for putting gear away than unpacking it. It's almost as if they're expecting you to be RTB'ing them and they want to receive packages nice and neat. Nevertheless, it keeps things tidy.

The other prominent item you'll find is a manual. Now a goodly portion of a motherboard manual is devoted to the BIOS. Apart from brief forays into GUI implementations, and the



Frustrating to find the S-Video converter conspicuously absent from your new all-singing, all-dancing videocard

addition of a few compulsory new menu items, the method of making changes to the BIOS itself has remained largely unchanged. A few subtle variations, like additional sub-menus, and the ability to adjust particular settings in real time via Windows have popped up but that's not completely new. Even the ancient 'Turbo' button could be used for real-time adjustments such as CPU speed (if equipped with a synchronisation circuit), while others simulated this effect by enabling/disabling the cache. Unfortunately, our packaged BIOS manuals have evolved at about the same rate and we've still got lowest common denominator explanations for important details. Like when you look up the explanation for 'AGP Aperture Setting', and it replies: 'Used to adjust the AGP aperture setting'... Ahh, I've always wondered about that...thanks!

If a technical manual is going to be more than a lip service agent, then it needs decent descriptions, not literal rephrasing. It should point out that the aperture is the amount of system RAM that can be utilised by the GPU, and that you need to ensure it's not too high such that it soaks it all up, leaving your games high and dry. Obviously that's going to increase printing costs but if the manual doesn't include genuinely useful information, why bother having one at all?

Because of this failing, most of us look no further than the diagram showing where the LED pins are and the valid memory arrangement table. And if we do, we're assaulted by International English, which is something akin to Klingon lingo run through Babelfish! You can get the same effect by taking any sentence, flipping every third word around with its nearest neighbour, and

then misspelling the rest! I know from my own experiences with re-translating manuals that it's economical enough to get a native language speaker from the product's targeted destination to do the final edit. Of course, if the manual is garbage in the first place, why bother?

I recently spied a concept that theoretically could make for an improvement in this area. The idea is to distribute game walkthrough guides in a digital multimedia format. Not the usual .pdf file favoured for electronic books, but instead as simple DVD video. The sample I've seen takes you for a visual run through a Hitman: Contracts level, demonstrating how to get through the game, with helpful audio commentary overtop pointing out important aspects. With the increase in portable DVD players, I think this could be applied to many situations, including hardware tech manuals. It could show you how to physically install components, how to tweak the settings, or the consequences of inappropriate changes. I'm excited by the prospect, and while the costs of such a venture would be higher, it's the sort of thing that could make a product stand out from the crowd.

Manufacturers need to think on both sides of the box; clearly manuals are one aspect to the hardware package that could be improved. We're not all swayed purely by product performance or superficial trappings. I'd like to see hardware manufacturers considering this, wouldn't you?

Jason Brown was conceived in a petrie dish in the laboratory of an inner city telephone exchange. When not talking tech in these very pages he can be found translating impenetrable Taiwanese hardware manuals into English while being nourished intravenously by optic fibres carrying electrolyte.

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**PC
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THE GUERRILLA GAMER

RTS Confessions

Why do I suck at RTS? Before we start, let me say that this is a big deal for me, to admit that I suck at RTS. It is contrary to the male ego to confess that he is not a master strategist. Every guy - certainly every PC-literate guy - wants to believe that if the call from the President comes, he will be able to answer it and lead a great army in a likewise great victory.

Not me though, I suck at it.

But why? Why am I unable to identify with the Starcraft savants who play the game like it's a shooter, using the cursor keys to scroll the map, while employing various arcane shortcuts to splatter my miserable base into a thin smear across the map? Why is it that mastering even the basics of effective hero use in Warcraft 3 is beyond me?

When it comes to virtual economies, now, I'm ace. I can make you some money, as long as it's play money. If I'm in a game of Generals and no bastard is harrying me, I can have \$20,000 in no time at all, just you watch me. But as soon as the tanks roll, I'm Mr Loser.

In fact, when I think about it, my real problem isn't building stuff or making cash, it's fighting. I can assemble a large force fairly quickly, with lots of upgrades and a good unit mix, but as soon as I send it against an opponent it gets rubbed out.

Starcraft is a particularly thorny thorn in my side at the moment. I know, I know, it's an ancient game but millions of our regional neighbours can't be wrong - they still play it obsessively. But the main difference between the nation of South Korea and me is that they know how to win.

So here I was, Protoss,



I'm the guy making all the wrong decisions even as you're running through a well-practiced building order

sending zealot skirmishers into my opponent's Zerg base. I was killing his drones, killing his pitiful little zerglings, generally having a pretty good time of it. Suddenly, he's got a bunch of mutalisks (flying units which my zealots can't attack) and it's a matter of mere seconds before he's knocked down all my pylons, cut power to my photon cannons and flattened my base. How is this possible? How could I suck that much?

Part of my problem is, I think, psychological. RTS is such a micromanagement-intensive game that once I've spent 15 minutes painstakingly assembling a perfectly balanced force, loaded my snipers into humvees, arranged them all in formation and flung them onto the guns of my opponent, it just

seems like such a huge chore to have to do it all over again. Worse, if I lose a building or two my brain seems determined to say "matey, you've lost the whole game." Knock down my radar, in particular, and your victory is all but assured.

So what's my escape? Can I train myself to realise that losing thirty units and a couple of flame towers in the opening minutes of the game doesn't necessarily mean I can't win later on? As I get older, I'm starting to doubt it.

Don't pretend you don't know my type. I'm the guy making all the wrong decisions even as you're running through a well-practiced build order. I'm the guy building ground-to-air units while you assemble a massive melee force. Or I'm the guy throwing Protoss scouts against ground

units instead of using them against air. See, I KNOW they're better against air, but still I try to use them as a ground assault force. Is it some kind of retardation? Can I get pills for it?

Pathetic as it is, I can't even win against computer opponents set to Hard.

I have found a stop-gap solution though. The other week, I dragged out my old copy of Red Alert. That's Red Alert 1, for the uninitiated. It's basically C&C running under Windows with a few very minor interface tweaks. But the best thing is that the AI sucks even worse than I do.

Yes, I have to admit to taking pleasure playing an eight-year old game with limited pathfinding ability. I can easily dominate the map, end up with a ridiculously huge bank balance and then build about thirty mammoth tanks and just roll them over the computer's base, cackling wildly.

What's more, in Red Alert if you lose your construction yard you are completely stuffed. So it's a matter of course that I build about eight migs and send them on a suicide strike which - given the limited nous of the AI - often isn't even a suicide strike. After that, it's all over bar the mammoth tanks.

Of course, I'm yet to try my hand against an actual human opponent. That could be a different kettle of fish entirely...

The Guerrilla Gamer is a flakey old PC gaming journalist who thinks that making a clean breast of his inability to win at even the simplest of games will somehow make him seem less pathetic in the eyes of the people whose approval he so desperately craves. Don't hate him, pity him.

NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL 2

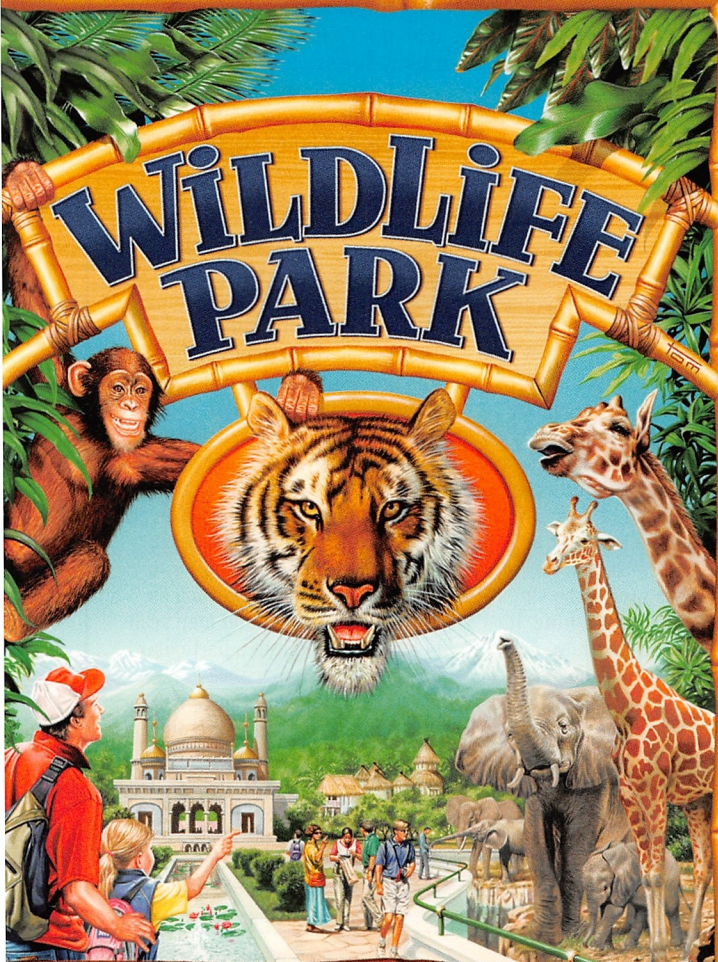
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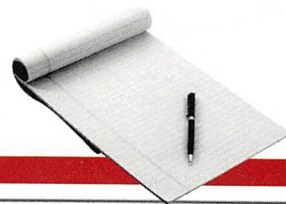
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DEVELOPER DIARY



Tribes movement dynamics in a single-player FPS DESIGNER DIARY #2

My name is Jonathan Pelling and I am part of the design team at Irrational Games, Canberra Studio. I was part of the art and level design team on Freedom Force, and I've been building levels in Unreal for T:V since the beginning of the project. In this diary I'll talk a bit about what we are doing from a single-player level design perspective to make sure you'll still know you're playing Tribes, and not just yet another first person shooter.

Bringing Tribes indoors

One of the earliest decisions that was made about what kind of FPS T:V was going to be was that the Tribes games are all about two things – first movement, then combat. This is a key distinction to make that really sets Tribes apart from other games in the crowded FPS genre. The mobility granted to Tribes players really is unparalleled in the genre.

This poses some interesting and challenging design considerations, especially when it comes to constructing the indoor environments that are so important to our single-player game. Tribes was never really about being indoors. Most T1 and T2 maps had some small indoor component, and a very few were almost exclusively in that setting. It's pretty clear, though, that the most interesting and fun gameplay occurs on rolling terrains where true mobility can be achieved. How were we, the designers of T:V, to translate the key movement dynamics of an outdoor terrain into the confines of an indoor space?

Before we could answer that question, we needed to decide just how important indoor spaces would be to our game. Our challenge from Sierra was to create an exceptional single player game with an exceptional story. Well, if you want a good narrative, you're going to have to channel the player so you can control to some extent the events that take place in the game.

That's why we decided that we would put a lot of effort into creating interesting indoor environments that played to the



strengths of the movement system, which also helps to fulfil our goal to train the player for multiplayer through the single player game. In our indoor spaces, you will not be able to just walk through from one end to the other – you will need to rely on all your movement abilities, including walking, jetting, even skiing and using vehicles. To that end, the indoor environments we are creating are some of the grandest in scale you are likely to see in an FPS.

Taking the FPS outdoors

There is a flipside to the coin, however. As I mentioned, Tribes is a game about free movement, and when it comes to outdoor terrains, this is almost unique to the FPS genre as it stands. Sure, BF1942, Planetside, Breed and others offer wide, seemingly unrestrained vistas. But they are not as unrestrained as you may think. Cliffs or slopes too steep to traverse, walls or detritus to block your path, even wide empty expanses, these are all design mechanisms put in place to coerce the player into a particular action.

Well, Tribes has the jetpack and skiing, and these render any reasonable blocking mechanism you care to think of ineffectual – or at least, not guaranteed of

being effectual. So we are not only challenged with taking this kind of unrestrained movement to the restrained indoor requirements of a story-based FPS. We are also challenged with taking the restrained story-based FPS's requirements and putting them into completely open-ended scenarios in the form of large terrains.

With the speeds a Tribes player is capable of achieving when skiing and jetting, how are we to ensure they do not simply ski through an encounter at a hundred miles an hour? If we can't channel the player's direction, how are we to ensure the encounter is even found?

In light of these questions, many of our outdoor missions have been scripted in such a way as to embrace the issue (or at least respect it), instead of trying to control it. As we get the single player game up and running, it will become clear just how effective these preliminary measures and assumptions have been, but it's an issue that will no doubt continue to challenge us.

Shazbot or Shiznit?

Finally, I'll give a brief description of the process involved in creating a level for T:V. As you know, we

have licensed the Unreal technology to build the game, so anyone familiar with the UT2003 toolset will have a good idea of how we work. The programming team has done much to streamline, enhance, or just plain fix many editor features, which makes our (and eventually your) level designing much simpler.

Creating the levels in T:V, for us, is a four-step process. First of all, we have a list of generic environments to create, including outdoor wasteland and alpine, indoor Blood Eagle and Phoenix bases and so on. Our art director, Ben Lee, concepts each of these spaces for the artists and the relevant level designer. We then embark on the content generation phase, in which the artists and designer work within a 'prototype space'.

The proto space is essentially a small level that is to include every art asset in such a way as to impart purpose or context for each asset, and also as a sandbox for design experiments. More than that, it is a space that can represent key gameplay issues, such as scale, whether the environment is fun to move through, and other macro issues such as those I have previously discussed. Once the proto space is built, every other level designer then has access to a kind of template by which they will design their own shippable single player and multiplayer maps.

There is some redundancy in this process, and although not all agree as to its usefulness, I think that if nothing else, it has helped iron out some bad level design ideas before they were implemented in a shippable level, as well as inspiring some great ones. It's also an opportunity to experiment with issues such as movement, physics and map scale before we commit to a particular design for each space.

As ever, the experience will contribute to better design and practices in the future, but T:V's levels are already looking great – not only aesthetically, but as fun and interesting game spaces – and over the coming months they are only going to get better.

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Earth is under siege by an alien race. The Strogg are cybernetic warriors - a mechanical frame and decaying body parts stabilised by flesh consumed in a systematic annihilation of other species and civilisations. In a desperate attempt to survive a Strogg attack on Earth, an armada of Earth's finest warriors is sent to take the battle to the Strogg home planet. Earth's assault force is nearly annihilated immediately, but one marine manages to infiltrate the base, bring down their planetary defense systems, and kill the Strogg's collective brain and leader - the Makron. Earth assumed the destruction of the Makron would end it all, but it didn't...

In a nutshell that was the tale told by QUAKE II. Now, with DOOM 3 out of the way and - to judge from the sales charts around the world - into the homes of gamers everywhere, id Software is ready to reveal just how the tale continues. Welcome to QUAKE IV.

The Strogg quickly regroup under a new and more powerful Makron. However, with the Strogg's planetary defenses still destroyed, Earth's forces can deliver a full and final assault. This time you're not alone. An army of soldiers is fighting with you and an arsenal of weapons and vehicles are at your disposal. QUAKE IV delivers you deeper into the heart of Stroggos, past their human factories, and directly into the cyber-realm, where you'll eventually become Strogg yourself.

QUAKE 4



QUAKE 4

First announced over three years ago at id Software's annual Quakecon event (see page 16), **QUAKE IV** is a collaboration between id and perennial development partners Raven Software. The game isn't due for release for a good while yet - indeed, Activision has adopted the usual id approach to release dates by repeating the "when it's done" mantra whenever we enquired - but we were lucky enough to secure interviews with several members of the Raven team as well as Tim Willits, **QUAKE IV**'s producer at id Software. Over the next four pages we'll let them do all the talking as we take a sneak peek at the future of **QUAKE**...



RICH JOHNSON Lead Programmer, Raven Software

Q. QUAKE IV USES THE DOOM 3 ENGINE. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE FROM DOOM 3?

A. **QUAKE IV** is more like an intense action movie to **DOOM 3**'s horror movie feel. We're going all out to deliver a fast paced adrenaline rush of combat. Overall, most of our work has been spent towards the creation of **QUAKE IV** itself as the **DOOM 3** tech provided us with many of the fundamental systems straight 'out of the box' so to speak.

Q. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT QUAKE IV MULTIPLAYER?

A. Since this is a continuation in the **QUAKE** series we felt **QUAKE IV** would best be served by capturing all of the things that made **QUAKE III Arena** great. With that in mind we are delivering a multiplayer experience akin to **QUAKE III Arena**. **QUAKE IV** features hyper-fast action, deadly weapons and all of the things that made **QUAKE III Arena** great - bounce pads, trick moves, you name it. Die-hard fans will feel right at home.



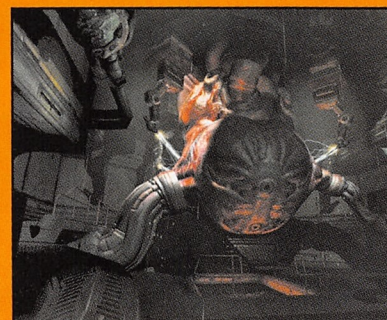
JIM HUGHES Lead Designer, Raven Software

Q. WHAT SORT OF EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE IN STORE FOR PLAYERS OF QUAKE IV?

A. **QUAKE IV** is all about being part of an epic sci-fi battle filled with fast-paced, explosive action. We're using the **DOOM 3** tech, so you know that **QUAKE IV** delivers an amazing experience, both with stunning visuals, set within an authentic science-fiction world, and heart-pounding, intense gameplay. Players are thrust into the role of a marine taking part in a massive invasion of the Strogg home world, where they get to experience the war while fighting alongside the huge marine invasion force as well as on their own.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THE VARIETY OF GAMEPLAY - WE UNDERSTAND THERE ARE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR MISSIONS AND VEHICLES TOO?

A. Without getting into too many specifics, we are creating a large amount of varied locations that players visit on their trek across the Strogg home world. The **DOOM 3** tech has been great. We're able to create both indoor environments and outdoor landscapes that will enable us to deliver an overwhelming experience for gamers. From journeying deep into Strogg industrial complexes to driving vehicles across the barren and blasted planet surface, players experience a huge variety of visuals and gameplay. As they progress throughout **QUAKE IV** they'll also meet a large variety of opponents and obstacles that they'll have to overcome to precede and survive the mission at hand.





BRIAN RAFFEL
Vice-President, Raven
Software

Q. HOW DID RAVEN GET SELECTED TO DEVELOP QUAKE IV? CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT RAVEN'S BACKGROUND?

A. Our relationship with id Software goes back to our early days of development. Together we worked on titles like Heretic and Hexen. Eventually we moved on to develop several titles using id technology. Our experience with first-person action titles, knowledge of previous id technologies and our strong working relationship with id made working on QUAKE IV a natural fit.

Q. HOW IS MOTION-CAPTURE BEING USED IN DEVELOPMENT?

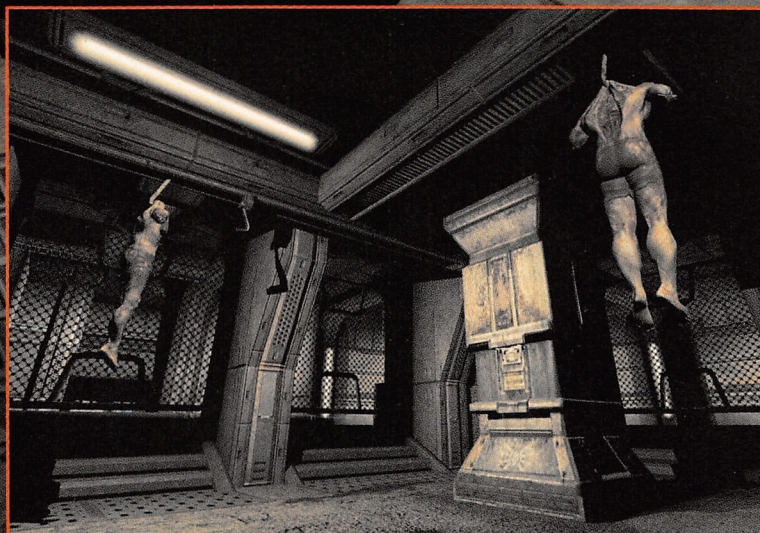
A. We've used motion capture in the past, at Raven, to help attain a more realistic feel and movement in our games. QUAKE IV has taken this to a new level as we have just added an in-house motion capture studio. This lets us greatly speed up animation times and get things into the game quicker. It also allows the animators to focus on making sure all of the alien, non-human creatures and objects in the game get the special attention that they deserve, in order to deliver the types of character movement and animation necessary in QUAKE IV. In short, by having the motion capture studio in-house it is letting us greatly expand our horizons in what we can do.

QUAKE 4

ZACK QUARLES
Lead Audio, Raven Software

Q. TELL US ABOUT THE SOUND DESIGN IN QUAKE IV?

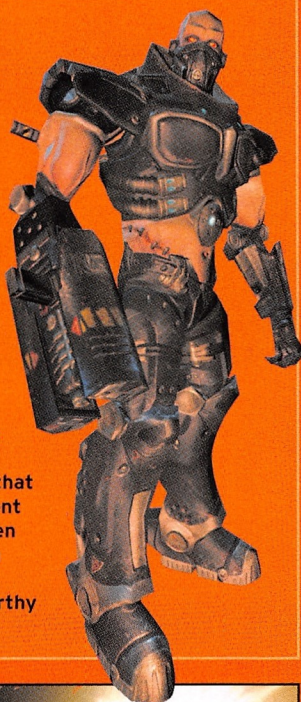
A. QUAKE IV utilizes a fully immersive 5.1 surroundscape. We have a complete Protools studio here in the Raven offices to make sure that the aural experience matches that of the visual element. The sound in QUAKE IV plays a very important role in defining the atmosphere and environment of the Strogg universe. Just like visuals, the audio will help present the hybrid nature of the Strogg embrace; the familiar with the alien, the organic tied to the mechanical. It is a sound designer's dream.



TIM WILLITS
Producer, id Software

Q. AS THE PRODUCER OF THE GAME AT ID SOFTWARE, HOW IS DEVELOPMENT COMING ALONG?

A. Development of the game is coming along nicely and we couldn't be happier with the progress so far. The DOOM 3 technology is very advanced and, even for a veteran team like Raven, quite challenging at times. But, with DOOM 3 now completed they are now working on finished code and any problems they may face we probably already solved while working on DOOM 3. id and Raven have had a long history of working together and that has helped a lot during the development of QUAKE IV. By taking our lead, Raven has done some great things with both the visuals and gameplay. We are confident that QUAKE IV will be a worthy successor to the QUAKE franchise.



ERIC BIESSMAN
Project Lead, Raven Software

Q. ARE ANY OF THE CLASSIC QUAKE ENEMIES RETURNING?

A. As QUAKE IV picks up from QUAKE II, many of the original creatures have returned. Look forward to once again battling Gunners, the Strogg Marines and Gladiators, just to name a few. We've also added plenty of new creatures to surprise veteran QUAKE fans out there. Plus, each enemy has been heavily updated to take advantage of the power of the game's technology, so all of the enemies are absolutely state of the art.

Q. WHAT ABOUT OUR FAVOURITE QUAKE WEAPONS?

A. As you would expect, some of the classic weapons from QUAKE II are definitely coming back, like the blaster (with flashlight), shotgun, machine gun and even the nail gun. We've gone through each weapon to make sure it's been updated and polished to be just right. And, we've also added some new firepower too for gamers to take into battle. We're staying true to the QUAKE series, making sure great care is being taken to really make the weapons shine.

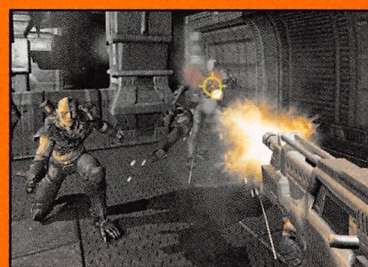
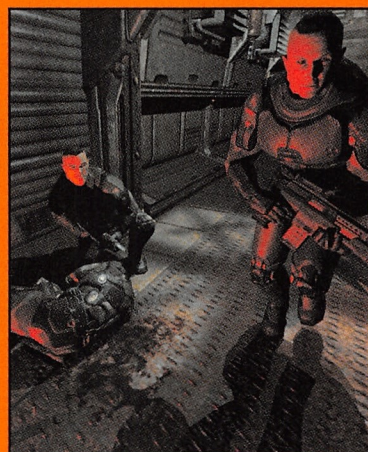
Q. HOW MUCH IS ID SOFTWARE INVOLVED?

A. We've always had a great working relationship with id and making QUAKE IV has been no different. In the past, we've worked closely with them on titles like Heretic and Hexen and we've also been privileged to work with their earlier technologies. Tim Willits and our design team have been working very closely on making sure that QUAKE IV not only remains true to the QUAKE II universe and is an outstanding game, but also that we're getting the most out of the technology and advancing the gameplay in fun and exciting new directions. We've also received awesome feedback on the artistic side of things. It's been a great give-and-take throughout the entire development and I think that everyone is happy that we've been able to mold a game that both companies are excited about. We were also very lucky because we had a sort of "backstage pass" for the creation of DOOM 3. We got to watch the game's creation from the ground up and that really gave us a great advantage when it came to making QUAKE IV. id would find the best way to do something and would pass that info on to us. It really saved us a lot of time. To make a long story short, there has definitely been a good deal of id Software involvement.

KEVIN LONG
Lead Artist, Raven Software

Q. TELL US ABOUT THE ARTWORK AND LEVEL OF DETAIL IN GRAPHICS IN QUAKE IV?

A. For QUAKE IV, we tried to retain the artistic look and feel of QUAKE II, but we've updated it with new artwork, textures, skins, and models. We have drawn upon a wealth of sci-fi and horror novels, comics, anime, and films as inspiration, as well as our own artists and modelers' fantastic ideas and concepts to create a truly horrific alien world and culture. Our modelers have created some really phenomenal looking creature models for QUAKE IV, with poly counts ranging between 750,000 polys on up to 4,000,000 polys for the high poly versions of our models. Thanks to the technological advancements of the DOOM 3 engine, the entire art team is very excited about the level of detail we're now able to throw into our characters, world models, and textures.





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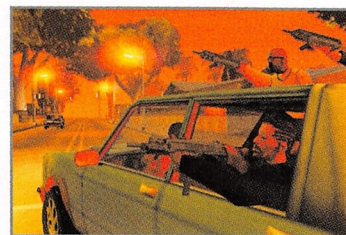
HOW TO ENTER

TO WIN THIS PRIZE ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS SUBSCRIBE TO PC POWERPLAY AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION: What is the native resolution of the EMP-TW10H?

Grand Theft Auto San Andreas

Mixing up some gin and juice

Developer: **Rockstar North** Publisher: **Rockstar** Distributor: **Take 2** Due: **TBA**



No it hasn't been "officially" announced for PC. Yet. (They've got to give the PS2 a few months of "exclusivity", after all.) But everyone knows it will be. And based on the precedent set by GTA3 and Vice City, we certainly won't be surprised to be playing San Andreas on PC around the middle of next year. So we figured we should probably tell you what's new in the world of GTA in preparation for that shock "It's coming to PC!" revelation.

So, what is new? The setting, for a start. Continuing the tradition of parodying real American cities, this time we're heading off on a crime spree through San Fierro (San Francisco), Las Venturas (Las Vegas) and Los Santos (Los Angeles). And San Andreas itself? That's the name of the entire state.

Perhaps the biggest change with the setting lies in the fact there are no longer mere bridges separating the cities or sections of the same city; instead there is now miles and miles of varied terrain between the

three major metropolises. With freeways cutting through mountains, valleys, rivers and the desert to connect the cities, Rockstar reckons the land mass of San Andreas is approximately six times the size of Vice City. Everything else is bigger too; more cars, more weapons, more bonus missions, etc.

Yet, besides the expected expansions, it's the more curious additions that may prove to have the most impact on the experience. Lead character Carl Johnson has to eat to replenish health. Rely too heavily on junk food however and Carl will pack on the pounds. Working out at the gym will keep him trimmer and in better shape for all the running and swimming he will inevitably do over the course of the game. Yes, we said swimming just then.

Carl will apparently also have various skills which will affect his ability to undertake certain missions, though the exact nature of this system has yet to be revealed. Real estate will play a larger role in proceedings than it did in Vice City, with Carl now building and managing his accumulated property rather than merely purchasing it and watching the cash roll in.

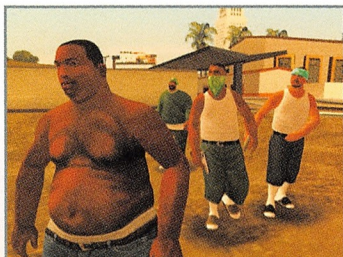
Lastly, Carl's gang, the Orange Grove Family, will even accompany



A factor of not inconsiderable annoyance in previous GTA titles was your inability to swim. Find yourself in water and it was essentially game over. With San Andreas, Rockstar has finally bestowed the breast-stroke upon your selection of controls - the result being that CJ can now survive falling into the brine or driving his car off a cliff. In addition to merely freestyling across San Fierro Bay, CJ can dive beneath the surface to explore the murky depths and scare some fish. We hear rumours of special stuff hidden under the sea...

him on missions, though again the detail - will they be scripted or under your control? - surrounding the exact implementation is sketchy. Nonetheless, the above PS2 screenshot of a four-man drive-by looks promising.

Once GTA: San Andreas ships on PS2 in late October, we're hopeful Rockstar will have some concrete info on the PC version. And you'll read it here first.



AT A GLANCE
Given Rockstar's cinematic predilection, San Andreas might be best described as The Streets of San Francisco meets Boyz n The Hood meets Ocean's Eleven.



Psychonauts

The maniac mansion of the mind

Developer: **Double Fine** Publisher: **Majesco** Distributor: **TBC** Due: **2005**



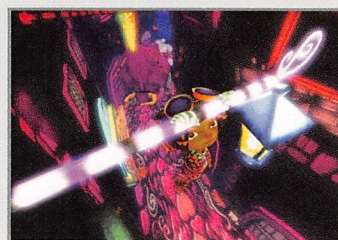
Tim Schaffer, one of the great visionaries of Lucasarts during its heyday as *the* adventure game developer of choice, is a name we haven't heard in PC circles for some time. Much of this is due to his development of the platform title *Psychonauts*. Originally an Xbox only release, a slight hiccup in the form of losing Microsoft as a publisher, has seen the game picked up by Majesco and green-lighted for appearance on PC as well as Xbox.

Outside of there being a dearth of quality platform games on the PC there is still plenty to be excited

about with this news. Playing the role of Rez, a psychic in training, you will traverse the mindscapes of a variety of individuals in an attempt to 'cure' them of their various psychoses through using the power of his mind. The mental disorders will receive physical form in the *Psychonaut's* world, allowing for some unique gaming moments and interesting puzzles for Rez to overcome. In the mind of a person possessed of a Napoleonic complex you will actually need to defeat them at Waterloo to bring them back to their senses.

Considering Tim Schaffer's previous track record in the realms of puzzling and entertainment this is one title we're really anticipating.

AT A GLANCE
It's like *Super Mario Brothers* on serious
psychedelic drugs.



Full Spectrum Warrior

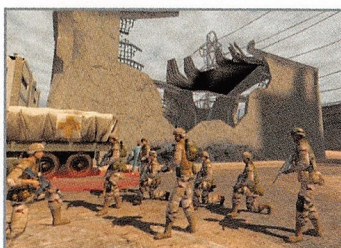
All the colours of the military rainbow

Developer: **Pandemic** Publisher: **THQ** Distributor: **THQ** Due: **Soon**

Originally designed as a training tool for the US Army, FSW is all about squad based tactics. Instead of having to control a single trooper, you play the role of the squad leader. As such you have to manage the entire team, and the game revolves around two main concepts - keeping your troops out of the line of your enemy's fire, and flanking your opposition to catch them unawares.

Your team is broken into two or three fireteams, which you'll control from a third person, controllable camera. Set in an imaginary middle Eastern country which bears a striking resemblance to Iraq, you'll need to lead these teams through a total of around ten hours of gameplay, broken up into missions.

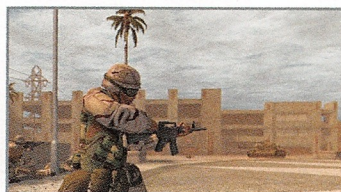
The PC version contains an extra couple of missions, but the major difference is in the way it looks. The Xbox version was no slouch in the graphics department, but the PC version steps everything



up a notch, with much higher resolution textures and a higher resolution.

We've played the Xbox version to death, and can quite happily report that the PC version is looking even better. Get your trigger finger ready to ride the pain train at the end of September.

AT A GLANCE
Is this what *Dubya*
plays whilst at home
on the ranch?



Splinter Cell 3 Chaos Theory

Sam Fisher wants to shimmy his way into your heart

Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Distributor: **Ubisoft** Due: **November**



Ubisoft Montreal's treatment of their follow-up to the highly acclaimed original Splinter Cell - and the third instalment in the series (the second was developed by Ubisoft Studio Shanghai) - is easily the most ambitious undertaking from the studio, ever. Assembling the largest team on any game they have ever had (115 people, excluding CG artists and testers), Montreal hopes to further cement Sam Fischer's espionage exploits as the frontier stealth franchise. The lengths the team has gone to in an effort to create the best Splinter Cell experience thus far are stretched and varied, creating a visceral game where just about anything you've ever wanted from the series is included and touched upon.

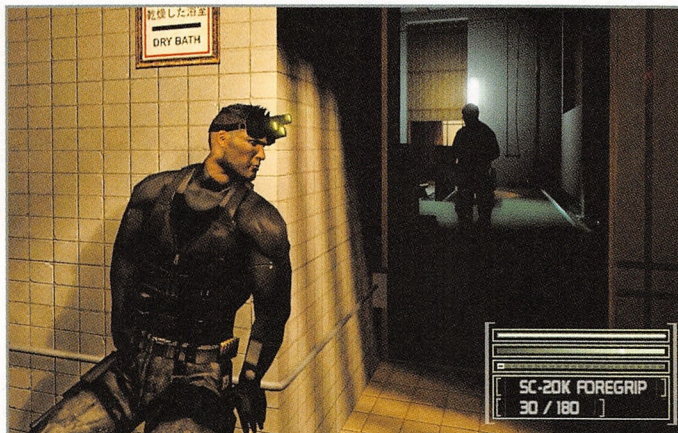
Clint Hocking, the game's Creative Director, Lead Level Designer and Script Writer has been working on the premise for Chaos Theory since they finished the original game, and also worked very closely with the script writer for Pandora Tomorrow so players would get the most comprehensive story arc possible from all three games. The inclusion of several key characters from the original and sequel in Chaos Theory go along way to securing a coherent plot for hardcore fans; whether first-time or casual players will be able to keep up remains to be seen.

Beyond a deep and involving story, players can expect a lot of subtle and major changes to the game's overall design but should rest easy in the motives for all changes. In the stealth department, for example, removing much of the frustration had with the first two



games was a major incentive in redesigning available paths through levels as well as the level of stealth and action that can be utilised with every scenario. To this end, it is now entirely possible to hack your way through a mission, Rambo style, without having to restart. However, such actions - we're told - will have significant ramifications for Fischer down the track, though we're yet to see any examples of this.

More gadgets have been introduced to further reduce frustration, like a weapon that interrupts technology for a brief period. So firing this weapon at lights will make them flicker rather than the traditional burst when you shoot them, this lowers the awareness of guards, making for an easier path through levels. More and more small additions like this have been implemented throughout the game helping remove any tedious gameplay moments and to keep the flow much more consistent for hardcore and casual players alike.



NEW TECHNOLOGY

Chaos Theory dabbles in a lot of new technology for games to ultimately create as realistic an experience as possible. As well as creating totally believable and stunning environments, the inclusion of Normal Mapping has added a level of polish that Montreal hopes will leave all other contenders in the genre for dead. An occlusion audio program was also written that adds a level of realism to sound within the game; audio is completely relative to your relation to its source, further deepening the ability for stealth situations and the exploitation of your surroundings.

AT A GLANCE
It's like Tony Hawk meets James Bond, only with more knives and less ramps.



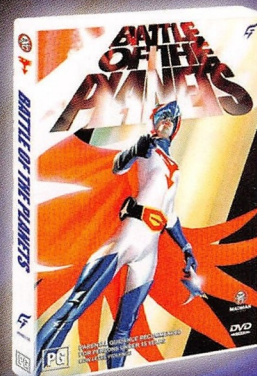


BATTLE OF THE PLANETS

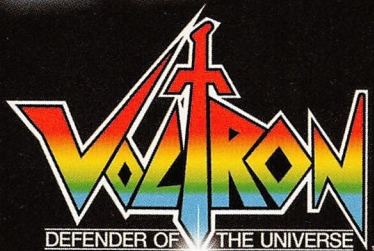
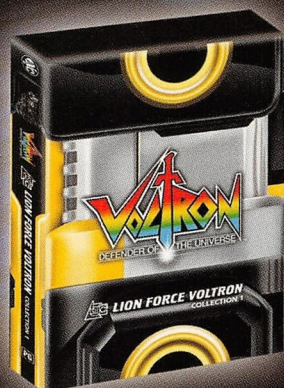
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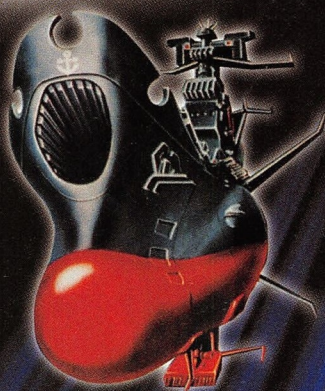
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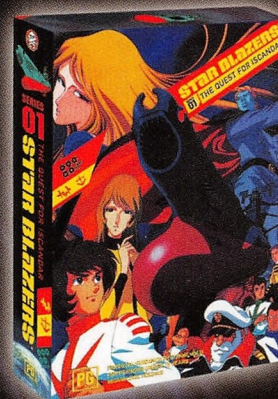


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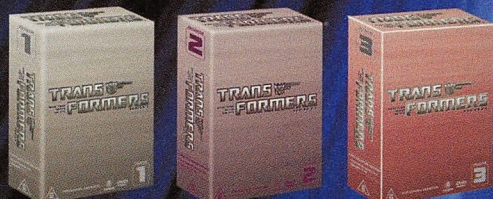
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Call of Cthulhu

Dark Corners of the Earth

FIRST LOOK



Dare you travel alone in the dark realms of the haunting?

Developer: **Headfirst** Publisher: **Bethesda** Distributor: **TBC** Due: **March 2005**

The works of renowned horror writer HP Lovecraft pose a particularly thorny problem for the game developer willing to transpose his gothic words into digital form. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos is founded on the unspeakable, the unutterable and the unnamable. How can a videogame do justice to that which the original creator can barely describe?

In the case of English (not to be confused with New England, Lovecraft's place of birth) developer Headfirst, the decision has been made to play it safe with the depiction of horrible beasts – so you can expect plenty of tentacles and slime and eyeballs and sphincters – but chance their arm when it comes to the game design.

Quite literally, you see your arm at all times. In an effort to heighten the immersion and persuade you of the plausibility of these dark corners of the earth, Headfirst has done away with the usual overly gamey on-screen devices. Doors won't magically open when you walk into them, instead you'll see your arm reach out, your hand grasping the handle and turning it. You'll have to



aim weapons by peering directly down the barrel without the aid of a crosshair. You'll have to memorise the number of bullets left without an ammo counter.

Health and sanity are depicted via visual queues that make sense within the game world. As you sustain injury, your movement will become more erratic and crimson will slowly seep across the screen. Instead of merely running over a medkit or similar contrivance, you'll need to bandage your wounds to stop the bleeding and apply treatments against various conditions and infections.

Witnessing the unspeakable horrors causes all kind of



disorientating visual effects, such as blurring and swaying as well as hallucinations and flashbacks.

In one of the most unsettling scenes we've seen in a game, if your sanity level drops far enough you will actually pull a gun on yourself and fumble for the trigger. Sufficient forethought to remove the ammo will see you survive; otherwise... well, we're not sure how the OFLC is going to view the notion of player suicide. Especially when depicted in such graphic and immediate fashion.

But context is everything here. Headfirst is recreating Lovecraft's work with the utmost respect and taking its task very seriously. As DOOM 3 has recently proved, survival horror is all about the atmosphere. And who better to provide inspiration than the master himself? We can't wait to go a little bit insane...

Headfirst's digital take on the Call of Cthulhu pen-and-paper role-playing game has little in the way of typical CRPG trappings. Certainly there are no character stats, NPC companions or suchlike. Nor is it a genuine first-person shooter, despite the obvious superficial similarities. From our brief experience with playable code it is very much the action-adventure – the FPS angle constrained by a deliberately slower pace and intermittent character interaction. Sadly the horror aspects may also be constrained by some at times cheap looking monsters and environments, but there's still plenty of time to sort that out before release.



AT A GLANCE
Imagine a cross between Thief 3's Shalebridge Cradle mission and the Waste Recycling Plant areas in DOOM 3.



TrackMania: Sunrise

Build it. Then race it.



Developer: **Nadeo** Publisher: **Empire** Distributor: **QV Software** Due: **Early 2005**



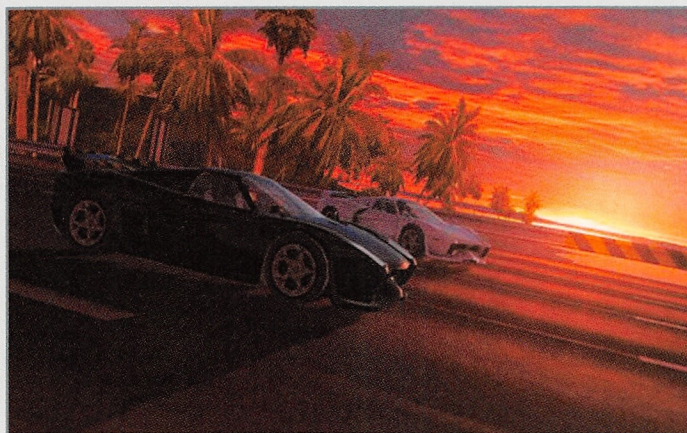
With its addictive mixture of gameplay pulled from a variety of diverse sources from the worlds of both racers and puzzle games, the release of TrackMania was a refreshing change from the seemingly endless supply of WWII themed titles that continue to clog up computer game store shelves.

Thankfully for those of us who appreciate something a little different, the gang at Nadeo is at it again with TrackMania: Sunrise. More than a simple upgrade, Sunrise has plenty to offer the rev head in need of more racing goodness.

A quick scan of the screenshots on this page display an even more

immersive high octane environment to race in - an improvement from the fun but ultimately sterile environments of the first game. Beautiful sunsets paint a vivid backdrop against which high speed muscle cars tear up the tarmac while even more ludicrous ramps, corkscrews and half-pipes send those same cars flying through the air.

In addition Nadeo promises improved online play and community support, including an integrated peer to peer network for content exchange. If online play isn't your thing there are an additional two new solo gameplay modes; Crazy and Platform. Get ready to rev your engines when TrackMania: Sunrise hits store shelves first quarter, 2005.



AT A GLANCE
It's like Pipe Dream meets Stunts as you build the tracks you must race.

Rollercoaster Tycoon 3

Apparently the aim is to encourage vomiting



Developer: **Frontier** Publisher: **Atari** Distributor: **Atari** Due: **November**



The remit for this third Tycoon trip is to convince the player they're actually inside the fun park rather than simply pulling the strings from above. To this end, the new real-time 3D engine caters for two new modes designed to make you feel like a guest in your own amusement creation. The first allows you to walk around the park, soak up the atmosphere, observe the paying guests and check out your handiwork first-hand. The second mode is called Coaster Cam and lives up to its name with a thrilling first-person presentation of all the ups, downs and roundabouts of your park's main attractions, the rollercoasters.

A more unusual new feature is the Fireworks Mixmaster. This tool lets you design your own fireworks displays - and the more spectacular, the happier your guests will be. You can go further and synchronise each display to your own musical selection, assigning a unique cut appropriate for each individual ride. Imagine riding a cutesy merry-go-round to the sounds of Motorhead or hotdog vendors enticing customers with some Snoop grooves.

Trivia fans may also be interested to hear that the developer, Frontier, is headed up by David Braben, perhaps best known as the co-creator of the classic space trading sim, Elite. Fascinating.



AT A GLANCE

Fairy floss, clowns and dodgems make management games fun. But does it have the substance to go with the style?



Pro Evolution Soccer 4

Probably endorsed by Mr and Mrs Soccer

NEW SHOTS

Developer: **Konami** Publisher: **Konami** Distributor: **Atari** Due: **November**



Football connoisseurs know that Konami's Pro Evolution series has been hammering rival FIFA home and away for the past few years. With what we've seen of this upcoming fourth iteration, the Japanese developer's dominance seems assured once again.

What impresses most is the range of new animations and finer fan control in one-on-one situations. Shifting your body weight to feint one way before knocking the ball past the defender and running around him on the opposite side is surely a trick we will never tire of. Couple these little jinks and dummies with the improved effectiveness of the sprint control

and you have a wealth of options to beat your man.

Further control tweaks include set-piece alternatives allowing for lay-offs when taking the newly introduced indirect free kicks and a much easier to master manual pass system (for those smart players using control pads).

Elsewhere expect a more extensive selection of fully licensed teams and player likenesses – right down to their running style and footwear. Oh, and the referee is now visible at all times on the pitch. Which is nice.

The new season starts in November. And it looks like another Championship trophy is on its way for Konami.



AT A GLANCE
This is the football sim Les Murray and Johnny Warren choose to play.



Football Manager 2005

It's football and you manage it. Next year.

FIRST LOOK

Developer: **SI Games** Publisher: **Sega** Distributor: **THQ** Due: **November**



Sports Interactive, the creator of the Championship Manager series, parted company with Eidos early this year and has since been working on a new football management sim called, er... Football Manager 2005.

Much remains familiar to any CM veteran, although SI has streamlined the user-interface for even greater friendliness. Cool new features include playing mind games with other managers by issuing statements about them or their club to the media; agents sending highlights packages of players keen to join your club; the

ability to offer your young players on loan to other clubs; canceling contracts by mutual consent; a job centre for recruiting coaches, scouts and physios; over 30 new stats for each player and a raft of other tweaks and improvements.

With Eidos remaining dedicated to the Championship Manager brand as it looks to release CM5 at around the same time, it's surely going to be a pulsating end-to-end cup tie between the two management sims. Of course, at the end of the day, football will be the winner... and both sets of fans should come away satisfied with their teams' performance. (Our money's on FM2005 though.)

AT A GLANCE
It's Champ Man with a lick of paint and a few tweaks under the hood. Just the way we like it, too.



Prince of Persia 2

He's back in black. Black pyjamas, that is.

Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Distributor: **Ubisoft** Due: **November**

Ubisoft's quality control team is working overtime these days. Since their stellar line-up at E3 2003, the third-party giant has done nothing but look and move forward. In an industry filled with treadmill ideas that expand our medium anywhere but forward, the publisher's vision for quality and innovation now feels more important than ever.

As a classic PC title, Prince of Persia holds a dear old place in our desktop hearts; Jordan Mechner's ability to utilise the PC medium and market to create a game of his own vision paved the way for the critical success that followed the Prince's console update late last year when The Sands of Time arrived first on PS2. A PC version came shortly after while the other consoles didn't see the light of Persian day until March this year, and in keeping with the themes of the series, history is about to repeat.

Unveiled at this year's E3, Prince of Persia 2 represents a much needed overhaul in the most annoying aspects of the first game,



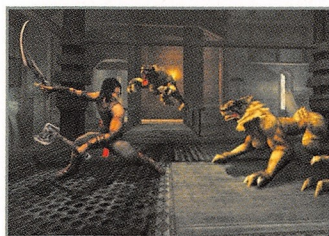
those being enemy confrontations, battles and acrobatics. The latter wasn't so much of an annoying point as it was an aesthetic addition of superfluous nature at times and proved a little too straight-forward for the more hardcore. In response, the Prince now has multiple ways to approach level impediments, opening up the game's loom to advancement, ten-fold. While the updates to battling and enemy run-ins are the most significant and stand as a true element to wanting to set aside a small portion of your life upon PoP2's release later this year.

The new combo system gives players an enormous amount of freedom; for every slice, there are an ornate number of additional slices. For every grab, there are numerous throws, hacks and holds. Some attacks are context sensitive, though most can be performed at any point in the game, and learning these is as easy as learning to walk. Enemies are no longer confined to 'battle areas' like the first game, and our royal protagonist will encounter them anywhere and at anytime. AI is still fairly low among the more common baddies, but the addition of sub and end-of-level bosses has upped the encounter ante somewhat, and these encounters will definitely test your ability to utilise the new combo system.

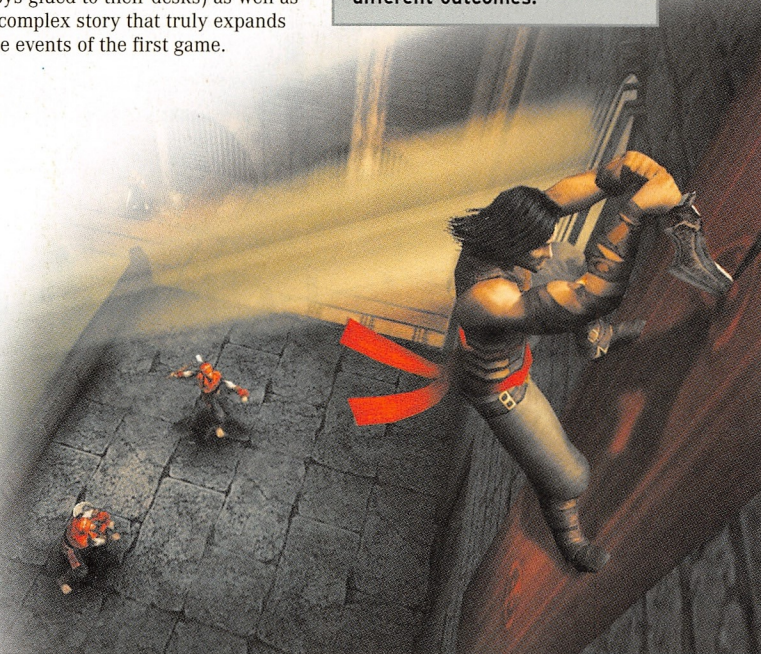


In addition to changing the game's battle and encounter system, Ubi Soft Montreal has gone all out in art direction, changing the face of the Prince to suit his presented maturity since The Sands of Time. Players can expect a much darker game now, with an emphasis on adult themes and concepts (the femme fatales alone will keep most boys glued to their desks) as well as a complex story that truly expands the events of the first game.

BATTLE ADVANCED
PC PowerPlay had a chance to speak to the game's Creative Director, Jean-Christophe Guyot, about the new combat system: "For each action you do there is a choice of different outcomes to the beginning move," says an excited Guyot. "So, for example, when you grab an opponent you will be able to add a secondary input to decide if you want to throw him, decapitate him, rebound from him or strangle him and steal his weapon. Same for the acrobatic jump over the enemy, there will be different outcomes."



AT A GLANCE
It's like Tekken meets Spider-Man, only with less webs and more boobs.



Your equipment holding you back?



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Men of Valor: Vietnam

The Vietnam War is the new black of computer gaming

Developer: **2015** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Distributor: **Vivendi Universal** Due: **November**



Men of Valor is the next in an ever growing procession of games covering this conflict, and its one of the titles we caught at Vivendi's recent game summit in Singapore.

Even though it's based on the Unreal engine, MoV was looking quite primitive when we saw it, especially compared to the current batch of first person shooters. However, we're guessing that this has something to do with the PCs it was running on, as the screenshots on this page are much more impressive.

One of the features we're most interested in is the individual

personalities of your squad mates. 2015 is aiming to recreate the intense bond found between soldiers who served. As well displaying these personalities through scripted speech, the AI of each soldier should also indicate what kind of trooper they are, a feature that we've not seen yet. As well as the standard on foot sections, there will be plenty of vehicular action, with door gunning from a chopper being especially prominent.

Men of Valor is going to have a tough time standing out from the game-infested jungles of Vietnam. We'll soon find out whether or not it succeeds, as the game is due for release in November.



AT A GLANCE
Take Call of Duty and then add more green. It's a jungle out there.



Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile

Where the Sims walk like Egyptians

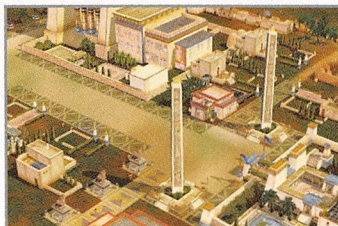
Developer: **Tilted Mill** Publisher: **Sega** Distributor: **THQ** Due: **November**

FIRST LOOK

Whilst under the Sierra umbrella, the now-defunct Impressions was a developer with - ahem - an impressive track record. Thanks to Caesar, Pharaoh and Zeus, the studio's "city-building" series produced consistently rewarding strategy titles until its closure last year.

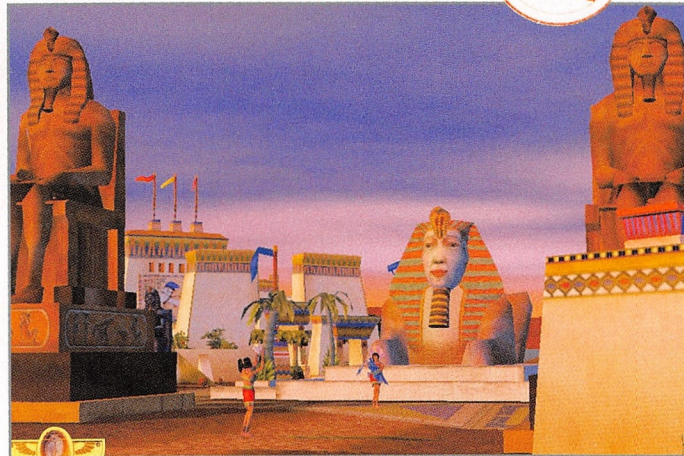
Tilted Mill was formed by numerous ex-Impressions people and the team's first title is none other than - yep - a city builder. Children of the Nile follows in Pharaoh's footsteps, insisting you take up the challenge of leading the people of Egypt and ultimately becoming the ruling Pharaoh.

Some of the game's systems depart from tradition, however, forgoing the usual dry approach to economics for a more plausible and engaging mechanic that focuses on the happiness and well-being of your people, the eponymous Children. There are no taxes, for instance; instead, they've adopted a



feudal system where you collect a certain amount of goods produced. Likewise, there are no construction costs on privately owned buildings so you can allocate such structures however you see fit; all you need concern yourself with is that delicate balance between supply and demand, happiness and dissatisfaction.

Thanks to the assistance of Stainless Steel Studios' Empire Earth engine, Children of the Nile even looks great for a city building game. Given Tilted Mill's pedigree it should prove a classy title come the end of the year.



AT A GLANCE
Looks like the Settlers have emigrated to Egypt and all they brought was a copy of Sim City.



F.E.A.R.

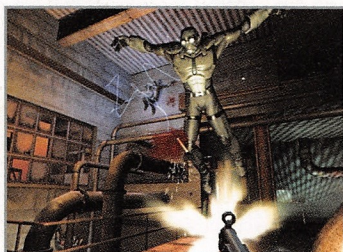
Proving nothing is scarier than a small Japanese girl

Developer: **Monolith** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Distributor: **Vivendi Universal** Due: **2005**

What do you get when you cross a realistic first-person shooter with the evil chick from the movie Ring? Apart from a heart attack, that is. The answer is F.E.A.R., which I was lucky enough to see in action at Vivendi's recent Asia Pacific Games Summit. After hearing the Goose blather on about the E3 demo for weeks, which I just happened to miss, it was no surprise

This clever (or cringe-worthy, you decide) acronym stands for First Encounter Assault Recon, which is the name given to your ultra top-secret, paranormal, military, kick-ass squad. It's your job to check out violent spooky situations. With the help of some blazing weaponry, of course, but sadly the proton pack from Ghostbusters is noticeably absent. But as well as a healthy selection of boomsticks, you're also blessed with psychic powers. During the demo these psychic attacks were displayed as a kind of static effect mixed with hallucinations, and were suitably spooky.

Doom 3 proved that to really fill gamers trousers, detailed dynamic lighting and shadows are crucial. F.E.A.R. has taken note of this, and thanks to the new engine designed



by Monolith, provides them in abundance. It's not just this facet of the engine that's looking great - the entire package reeks of next generation technology. Which is probably part of the reason it ran quite choppily during our demo, but the fact that none of the game's textures were compressed didn't help either.

Thanks to the latest version of the Havok physics engine, enemies and objects tumbled realistically when given a little push with the shotty. A Max-Payne-esque slow motion feature allows you to see these physics in all their believable glory.

Unlike Doom 3, there wasn't a single monster closet in sight during the demo. The gaming even extends beyond cramped corridors, with plenty of outdoor sections and the obligatory vehicle rides, which play out like rollercoasters of death and disaster.

Regardless of the iffy performance and the fact that we played it in a crowded room with all the lights on, we still managed to let



AT A GLANCE
Max Payne joins a SWAT team and ends up on the set of a Japanese horror flick.



out a little girlie scream when we encountered our first demonic child. Walking on the ceiling. Considering the game isn't due until sometime in 2005, and we were struggling to hear F.E.A.R. over the annoying taunts of Leisure Suit Larry from the demo machine next door, that's got to be a good sign.



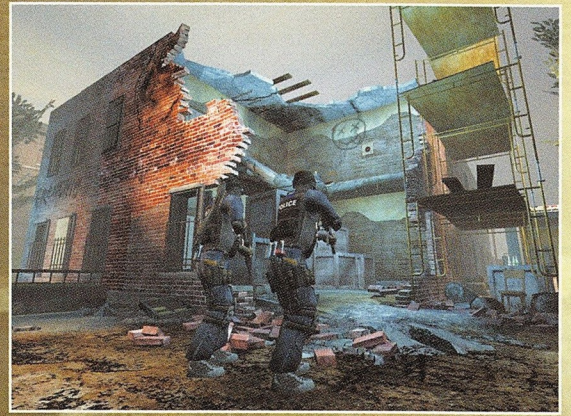
Squad based AI. There we said it. Yep, F.E.A.R. includes teams of bad guys who will actively cooperate as a team, making the AI seem much more lifelike. They'll even use other, more heavily armoured, units for cover, advancing behind these walking tanks. Cool.



SWATTING

THE FORCES OF EVIL





**BENNETT RING OPENS THE DOOR ON SWAT 4,
A GAME THAT IS SET TO REDEFINE THE
MEANING OF THE WORD REALISM.**

SWATTING

THE FORCES OF EVIL



A PACIFIST'S APPROACH

We all know that putting a bullet in somebody's noggin is the last resort, and despite all their high tech weaponry, it's very un-SWAT-like. Besides, wouldn't you rather the punk to stew in a prison cell for the next 20 years rather than die a quick and painless death? Therefore it's not wise to shoot first, ask questions later. If a target raises their hands, you can cuff them, and then have your other team mates escort them from the premises.

It's hard to believe that SWAT team members are real life human beings, and not genetically enhanced warriors from a planet where the primary pastime is shooting things. With nerves of steel, reflexes like a steel trap and a total lack of fear, a SWAT team is the ultimate solution to any violent encounter. Don't let the recent film of the same name fool you - these guys are some of the most disciplined, highly trained people on the planet. No wonder then that the SWAT series of games has built up a solid following of devoted fans, especially amongst those who prefer their shooters to involve a little more thought than simply pumping everything that moves full of lead. The next in the series, SWAT 4, is just around the corner, ready to pry the title of most realistic shooter from Mr Clancy's cold, dead hands.

I was lucky enough to catch the game in action during Vivendi's recent Asia Pacific Games Summit. While sitting through a presentation of some kiddie's clone of Ratchet and Clank, trying not to fall asleep as the presenter jumped from one platform to the next, a lone PC in the middle of the room caught my attention. Compared to the technicolour cartoon I was supposed to be viewing, how could I not stare in awe at the realistically modeled MP5 that was on screen, complete with glowing tac-light and other spiffy add-ons. It was pointing towards one of the most realistic scenes I've yet seen on the PC. It turned out to be SWAT 4,



and according to the game's producer, Rob Irving, the game uses a version of the Unreal engine known as Vengeance. This is hard to believe considering how good it looked, but it's got one major difference: "Most importantly, we've got normal mapping in the game now, and it's used extensively throughout the levels. Everything looks incredibly lifelike." After seeing the engine in action I can testify that this one addition has brought the engine up to the graphical prowess of cutting edge engines such as Source, with surfaces that look truly three dimensional. No more perfectly flat textures are to be seen here, with the believable undulations of real world surfaces adding to the game's realistic look.

Most of the action takes place in relatively small, indoor areas, which is the environment the real SWAT team spends most of their time

blasting their way through, and this has given the developers the luxury of adding a ton of detail to the environments. Stacks of furniture and hundreds of objects populate these levels, and of course there are plenty of shelves full of trinkets conveniently placed between you and the bad guys. Our favourite physics friend HAVOC has been implemented beautifully, so these trinkets will shatter and fall in a realistic manner. These physics are also applied to the lifeless bodies of your last targets, with full rag doll effects in place

The Brain Game

A major problem that Raven Shield suffers from is poor artificial intelligence. It's so bad that ordering your team mates to open a door and clear a room is a great way to end up with a team of fly-blown corpses. Sure, they know how to



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LENGTH

A total of 16 different missions are planned for the final release, but you can replay these several times as they're most definitely not linear. If you do plan on blazing through the game as quickly as possible, the developers assure us there's around 20 hours of play time. Once you've finished these the multiplayer modes should keep you playing even longer.

WALKING AND TALKING

One AI feature that was instantly noticeable is the amount of chatter between all of your team mates. These talkative guys make the marines in *Half Life* look like a team of mutes. This helps increase your situational awareness without having to take your eyes off your gun sight.

open a door nicely, but they'll daydream in the open doorway as they're gunned down by a terrorist. During my preview of *SWAT 4* the team mate AI seemed a little better, but there was still a lot of work to be done. But when the AI programming has been completed Rob says we should be able to "just sit back and control them remotely from the start of the level. As the squad leader, you're not supposed to get in the line of fire all the time".

Even though the AI was a little stupid during my visit, it was already showing some nice routines not seen in a game before. When ordered to open a door and throw a flashbang into the following room, all team members would line up on either side of the door, out of view of the enemies within. One member would open the door slightly, while another would then toss in the grenade, using the same tactics as the real world SWAT teams. The AI would then pause to let the grenade detonate before opening a can of grade-A whoop-ass on the bad guys. Unfortunately there were a couple of instances where the AI would get stuck in front of a doorway, and due to my lack of understanding of the interface I resorted to the semi-automatic 9mm approach to clear them out of the way.

Speaking of the interface, this area of the game has been given one of the biggest polishes. Unlike *Raven Shield*, the *SWAT* games are more about planning on the fly rather than setting

everything up before hand, so it's obviously got more commands and options on hand. Using this hasn't always been the easiest of tasks, but *SWAT 4* promises to change this. Explains Rob, "We've completely revamped the game's interface. No more digging through nested menus with your keyboard to find the right command - it's all just point and click. Everything has been simplified and made more user-friendly (Although we've left the classic interface available for all of the die-hard players)".

To aid in the control of your team mates, mini-windows for your other team mates are present on screen. So you can watch what you're doing in the main view, while keeping an eye on exactly what situation your team mates have stumbled into. The coolest of these windows is a special sniper window. Again, just like real life, your SWAT team will rely heavily on sniper support, known in the game as Sierra squad. You can quickly flick to your snipers' viewpoint to take control of the sniper, or you can just let the AI handle it. Your sharpshooters will let you know if anything suspicious crosses their line of fire, and even when they've got the SWAT team in sight.

Guns, guns, and more guns

It wouldn't be a *SWAT* game without a swag of real world armaments, but now there are more non-lethal solutions on hand. The coolest of these is the taser, which can take down even the most heavily armoured bad guy in seconds - provided you can get close enough to him. Bean bag rounds are also present, which are simply tiny beanbags that can be fired by shotguns. They don't kill hostiles, but they sure do sting. Unlike *Doom III*, Surefire tactical lights are included, so you won't ever have to lower your weapon to shed some much needed light on darker areas. All of the weapons in the game are licensed, and every

weapon that *SWAT* uses in real life is included in the game.

What good would these guns be if they handled like the BFG? Ok, they might be able to clear an entire building with one shot, but that wouldn't be much fun for the hostages, would it? "Our guns are very carefully modelled, and we've licensed a number of great weapons to ensure that we've got the most accurate models possible". Bullet penetration, a hallmark of the *SWAT* series, is present once again, so you'll need to be cautious when approaching wooden doors - the bad guys are smart enough to shoot at you through surfaces they know won't stop their bullets.

Fun for the whole family

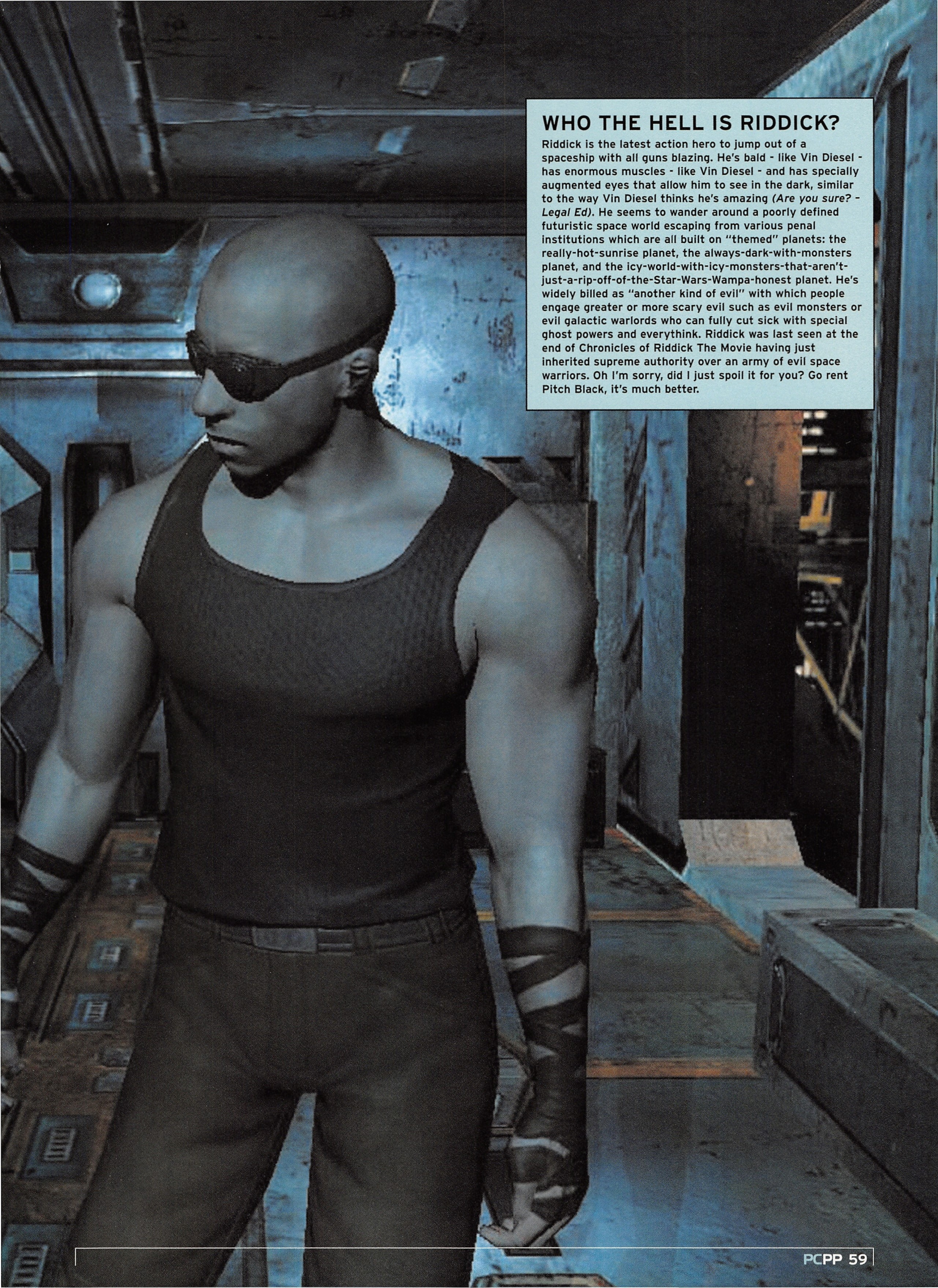
Full co-operative play is included, which should be a total blast when played with a few mates (hooray!), and several head to head modes are also present; unfortunately Rob didn't divulge any details about what these entail, nor how many players are supported online.

While it was hard not to be impressed by how realistic the game is looking, not to mention how feature packed it is, it was one of the minor details that I couldn't get over. On the briefing screen before the mission, whose map isn't always 100% accurate (it's often just a hand drawn diagram), there's a little 911 call button. Clicking on this presents the player with a recording of the initial 911 call that triggered the police reaction to the situation. This made the following mission much more believable, and actually endeared me to the terrified hostages I was tasked with saving. It might not sound like much, but it's the small details like this that will surely set *SWAT 4* apart from the rest of the pack. As Rob proudly exclaimed at the end of our interview, "If you had to define what a *SWAT* game should look and feel like, this is it."



RIDDICK ME THIS...

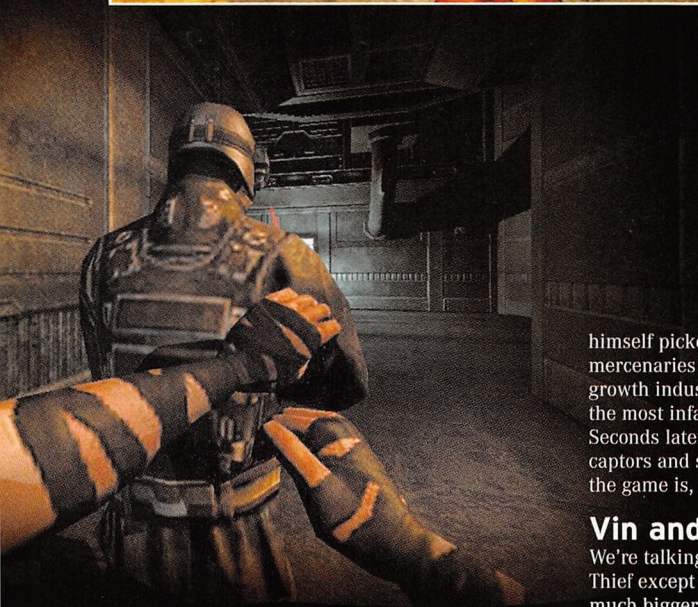
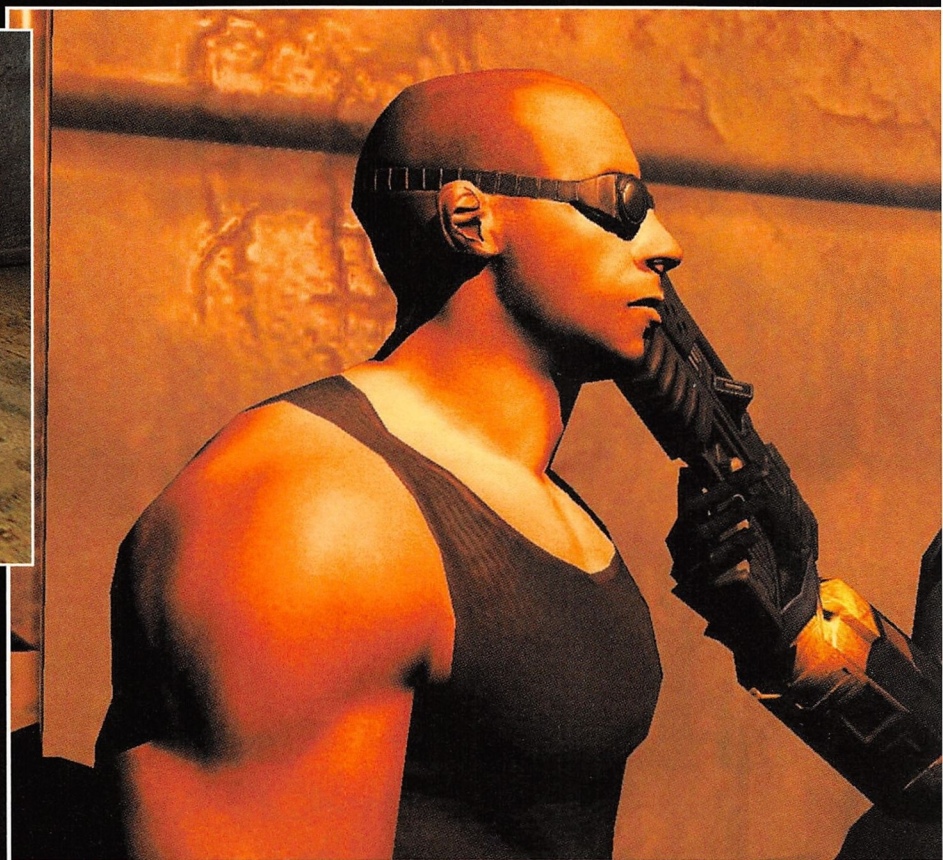
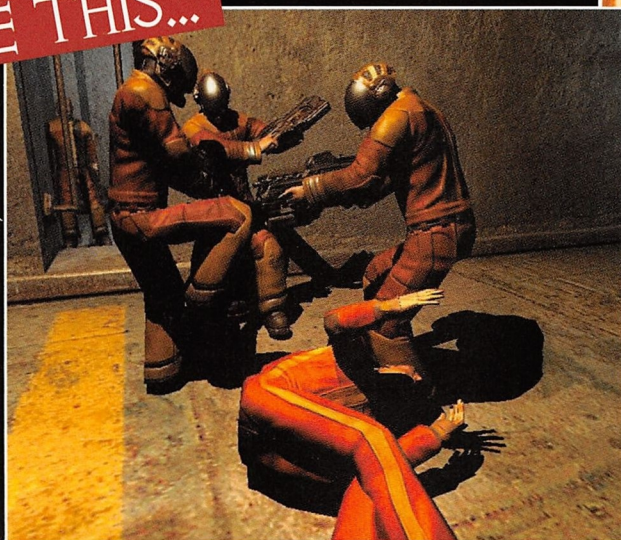
...if games based on films are always crapper than the film, and *Chronicles of Riddick* is widely regarded as a fairly crap film, why is *Chronicles of Riddick* not a crap game? **Anthony Fordham** - who, like Riddick, is a different kind of evil - investigates.

A full-page photograph of Vin Diesel as the character Riddick. He is bald, wearing dark sunglasses, a black tank top, and black pants with a belt. He is standing in a dimly lit, industrial-looking environment with metallic walls and floors. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his muscular physique.

WHO THE HELL IS RIDDICK?

Riddick is the latest action hero to jump out of a spaceship with all guns blazing. He's bald - like Vin Diesel - has enormous muscles - like Vin Diesel - and has specially augmented eyes that allow him to see in the dark, similar to the way Vin Diesel thinks he's amazing (*Are you sure? - Legal Ed*). He seems to wander around a poorly defined futuristic space world escaping from various penal institutions which are all built on "themed" planets: the really-hot-sunrise planet, the always-dark-with-monsters planet, and the icy-world-with-icy-monsters-that-aren't-just-a-rip-off-of-the-Star-Wars-Wampa-honest planet. He's widely billed as "another kind of evil" with which people engage greater or more scary evil such as evil monsters or evil galactic warlords who can fully cut sick with special ghost powers and everything. Riddick was last seen at the end of *Chronicles of Riddick The Movie* having just inherited supreme authority over an army of evil space warriors. Oh I'm sorry, did I just spoil it for you? Go rent *Pitch Black*, it's much better.

RIDDICK
ME THIS...



himself picked up by yet another gang of mercenaries - apparently, Riddick-hunting is a growth industry. They take him to Butcher Bay, the most infamous penal colony in the galaxy. Seconds later, Riddick brutally murders his captors and slips into the ventilation system and the game is, as they say, on.

Vin and vigour

We're talking a sort of stealth-shooter hybrid, like Thief except with a lot more machismo and much, much bigger guns. It's about tight maps, thoughtful sneaking puzzles and the occasional blistering firefight. It is, in short, pretty good.

But so far we've only played it on the Xbox. The normal-mapping and the dynamic shadows make it one of the prettiest games for Microsoft's console, but in a world where we've all played Doom 3, it's going to take a lot more than that to impress a PC audience.

Developer Starbreeze has been basking in the warm light of success since Riddick hit shelves for the Xbox in late July. Here in Australia the game ran solidly in the top three for several weeks, and reviewers across the world said it put a merciless choke-hold on the one-time-truism that film franchise games are crap.

But now Starbreeze has to face a PC audience. An audience so particular about its gaming that you can build the best engine in the world, have the best monsters and the coolest atmosphere, but people will still lambaste you for not making the flashlight gun-mounted.

Riddick is about stealth, shooting and

overwhelming your enemies with sheer cool. It's about using your groovy low-light eye modifications to creep around in the dark and jump out on poor bastards who must then face a digital Vin Diesel armed with nothing more than a rocket launcher.

Frogs go "Riddick"

So we've already played it on Xbox, why should we pick it up for PC? Starbreeze producer, Lars Johansson claims the PC version will simply give you more.

"More content is what we're talking about. The PC version will feature a couple of new levels that will solve some of the obvious pacing problems we had in the stealth areas in the second part of the prison," he says.

The other good thing about doing a PC version of a game you know has already done well on another platform is that you can then implement the cool things Xbox players wish they could have had in their version.

"You'll be able to step inside one of those Riot Guard suits you see in the Xbox version, and there will be a number of new enemies not seen before," says Johansson.

Further details about the differences are more ephemeral. Johansson promises tweaks to balance and difficulty, but otherwise just says there will be more improvements in various areas.

Controlled violence

One area that we'll be watching closely is the transition from gamepad to mouse/keyboard

Vin Diesel is living the dream. He's a big man. He has a deep, deep voice. Certain kinds of women dig him very much. And he gets to play macho characters in action movies that - unlike pretty much everything Arnie has ever done - manage not to make him seem gay.

If vicious rumour is to be believed, Vin has also been keen for some years to find himself in a videogame. In fact, in the "excellent" movie XXX, Vin is approached by a saucy cybergoth chick who asks him if he does indeed want to be in a videogame. Recursive reality!

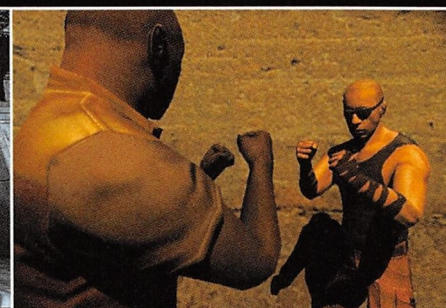
Diesel powered

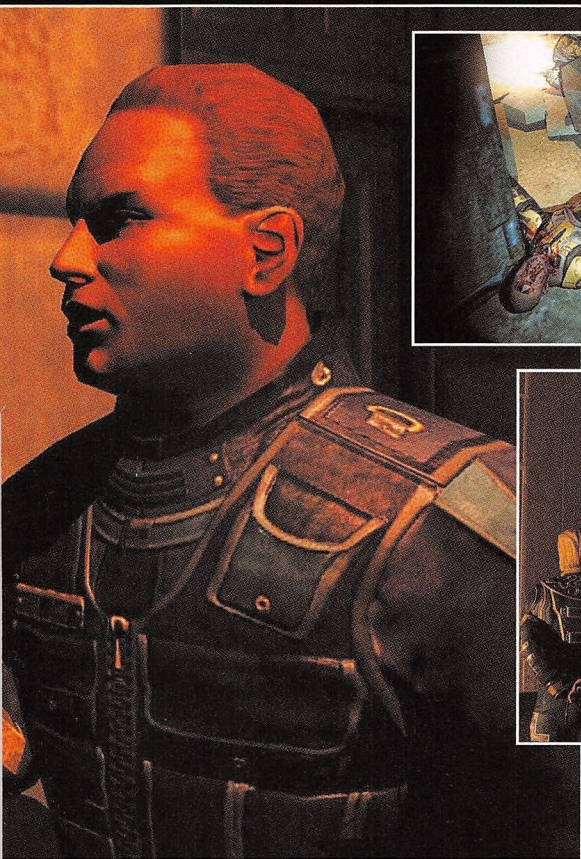
Whatever XXX says about Vin Diesel's actual real-life ambitions, he has indeed lent his voice and digital persona to this latest film tie-in - a game which is being hailed as "better than pretty good" the length and breadth of the Xbox-owning world.

Yes, it's out on Xbox first. And yes, like so many other Xbox titles it's now coming to PC despite the "Only on Xbox" sticker on the front cover. In the case of Riddick, however, that could be something to get excited about.

Remember the bit in Chronicles where Riddick is chained in the hold of the skanky merc ship and they're all discussing the various "slams" they could dump him in? Riddick reminisces about the good old days in Butcher Bay, and it's here that the game is set. That makes it a sort of prequel to both Chronicles and the earlier (and superior) Riddick-central film Pitch Black.

We open with Riddick fighting a bunch of monsters on an ice world and then finding





A winning formula

Riddick's success on Xbox can probably be attributed to its combination of gameplay elements not normally seen on that platform. But PC gaming has always been more diverse. Apart from the almost overwhelming competition of Doom 3 in the "I'm the prettiest DX9 engine" stakes, Riddick must also flex his manhood against Thief: Dark Shadows, which remains the consummate sneaker.

"But we still believe we are quite the unique gaming experience both on Xbox and PC," Johansson insists.

"Escape from Butcher Bay picks up with some adventure which leads the player to break out. This will have to be done using stealth until the player gets his hands on a gun. A gun is all that is required to get some action going."

Of course you, as a discerning gamer already bitterly shattered by how poorly Doom 3 runs on your ageing PC, will want to know whether or not to spend \$500 on a new video card for Riddick, or just go buy the game plus a brand new Xbox for a total of \$349.

"There will be a number of scaling options for people who do not have systems that fit the recommended specification," Johansson reassures us. "Options such as world and character shadows can be turned off, and texture quality (difficult, normal-maps, specular maps) options will be available."

But folks with mega-machines can rest assured they will be in for a visual treat, Johansson claims.

"Running the game on recommended specs will result in a crisper and higher res version of Riddick than previously seen. Players will notice that characters and world textures stand out more in terms of detail and quality."

Which is what it's all about really. What's the point of playing as Vin Diesel if you can't see the sweat glistening on his distended, freakishly powerbuilt shoulders?

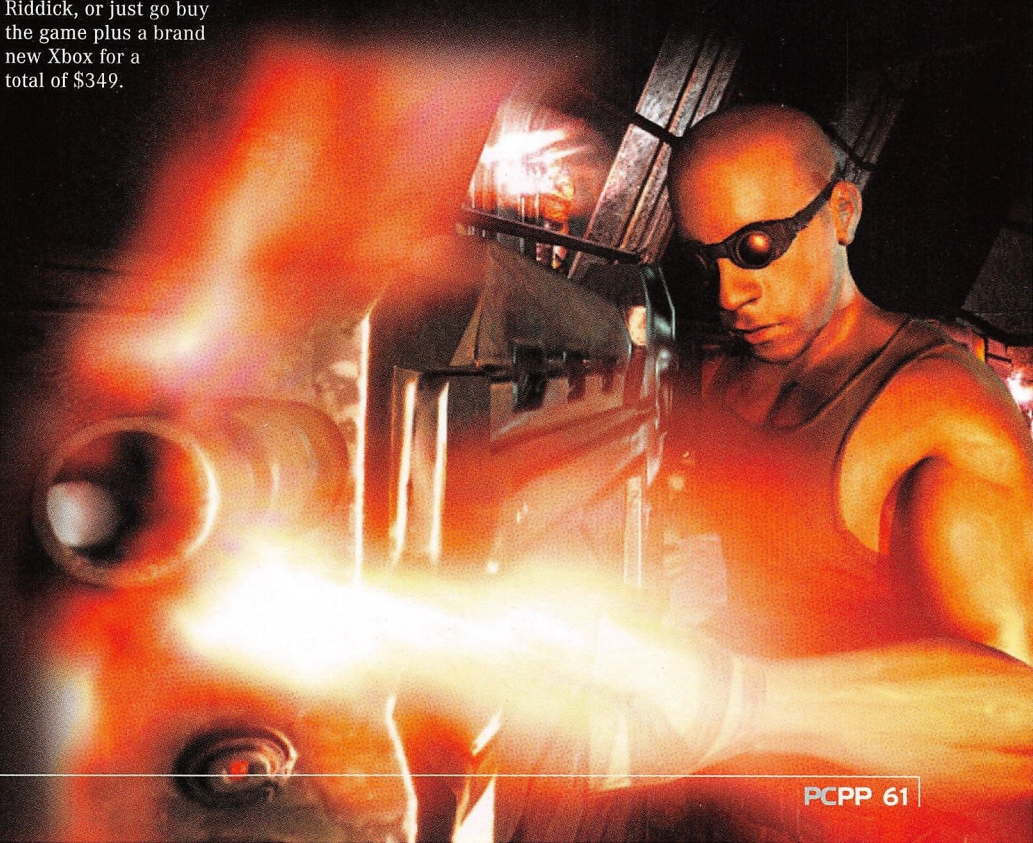
Stealth, shooting, adventure, one-liners and a deep, deep voice. That's what Riddick is all about. Are you ready to fight evil with a different kind of evil? Dame Judi Dench is. You should be too.

control. The control system for Riddick is rather fine. Excellent design and careful thinking make it one of the easier shooters to deal with, especially given the complexity of the number of moves Riddick can make. Shooting, climbing, creeping and melee combat are all implemented, which really puts the Xbox controller through its paces.

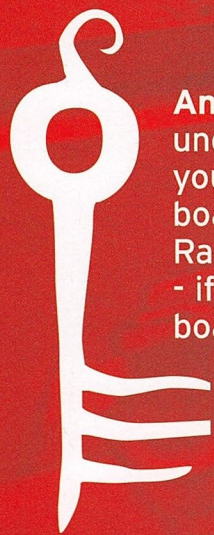
"We worked a lot on the controller method for the Xbox version," Johansson agrees. "We will do some tuning to the accuracy. A mouse is way more accurate than an Xbox controller, so some tweaking is required."

Starbreeze can get plenty of inspiration from other PC games. But while Thief and Doom 3 will show off how to handle sneaking and action respectively, the developer may have to stretch a little further to find a decent PC beat-em-up that uses mouse.

Oni springs to mind, much like its lithe heroine could spring her dainty heel into the face of an oncoming opponent. Riddick's melee attacks aren't so much about martial-arts style finesse, however. He's more of a brawler, a thump-em-until-they-stay-down guy. Better than pounding them into cheese, Riddick likes to sneak up behind some poor sod (who, after all, is only doing his job) and snap his neck with the sheer power of his mighty biceps. Naturally, the player gets to indulge in this kind of up-close-and-personal combat a lot in the game.



TREADING THE BOARDS



Anthony Fordham might not be able to drink you under the table, but he's more than game to play you on top of it. He's never given up on the boards, not even after *Roller Coaster Tycoon* and *Race to the Roof*. Now he takes a look to see what - if anything - PC gaming still has to learn from board games. And vice versa.



FROM THE BOARD TO PC

Space Hulk

And so the fight is on. We thought the PC game was an achievement in tense play, given the limited graphics of its day, but this original version is even more amazing. How do they make it so tense? With a configurable game board and plenty of little fiddly extras, Space Hulk will keep you away from the PC for hours.

OVERALL: AWESOME. SOMEHOW MANAGES TO BE TENSE, WITH NOTHING MORE THAN A FEW DICE



Kingmaker

Sick of fantasy, fantasy and more fantasy? Try a bit of historical fiction. Based on the War of the Roses, each player takes control of a royal faction in an attempt to get their heir on the throne. The PC version of 1994 was similar, but you just can't beat the visceral feeling of throwing a bunch of cards in your opponent's upstart face.

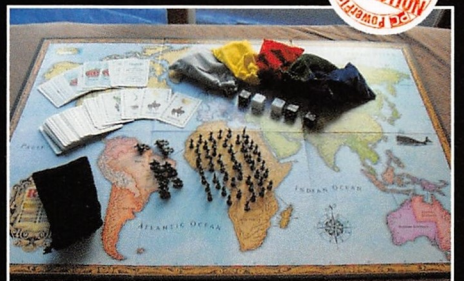
OVERALL: NOT FOR EVERYONE, BUT A WELCOME DEPARTURE FROM FANTASY AND WW2



Risk

Hardly any rules. Three different kinds of pieces. A handful of dice. A map of the world. Equipped with only these things and a bunch of friends (who won't stay friends for long) you have probably the best multiplayer boardgame experience ever devised. As pure as chess and as diplomatically convoluted as real life. Forget the PC version. Play this.

OVERALL: WHAT CAN WE SAY? PROBABLY THE BEST WARGAME EVER





Age of Mythology

This conversion is kind of weird because it's as if the designer said "yeah, I've played AOM and there's no way I can convert it into a boardgame, so here's another boardgame with AOM flavour." However, this is a good thing. Forget the giant sprawling world map and the little armies, AOM is more of a combination resource management and

card-duelling game, with a bit of miniatures-based battle thrown in for good measure. The aim is to build up victory points (little wooden cubes) by playing cards, buying upgrades, and engaging in combat.

It's pleasingly deep and tactical, and once you've played a game or two you realise that while the mechanics are nothing like the PC version of AOM the boardgame is very true to its spirit. You will need to decide which units to deploy when, how to spend your resources, and when to cut and run.

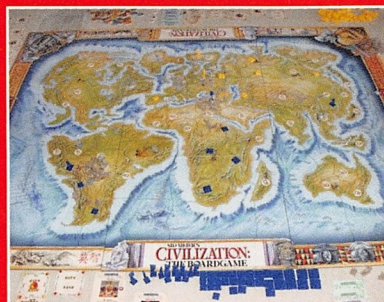
Of the three PC-to-board games reviewed here, AOM works the best, looks the best, and is probably most suited to PC gamers.

OVERALL: COMPLEX, THOUGHTFUL AND INTERESTING. PROBABLY THE BEST PC-TO-BOARD CONVERSION



Civilization

Forget what you know about Civ. Like Risk the board is divided into territories, but unlike Risk there doesn't seem to have been much thought put into what strategic issues borders can create. Resource tokens are placed face-down on each territory and then players move settlers around, flipping over resource counters. If they like the resource there, it's time to found a city, build up military, buy technologies and great wonders, and amass power and victory points with a view to coming out top in the endgame. Just don't expect to get there in less than about eight hours of solid play, is all. This is a long, slow, fiddly, intense game that will exercise your bookkeeping ability more than your military nous. Combat is sparse, because armies are so expensive no one wants to risk losing them.



It doesn't really feel like Civ, but it's nevertheless an impressive attempt at converting such a complex game to the board. Great for long holiday afternoons with your cousins.

OVERALL: BLOATED AND OVERCOMPLICATED, BUT STILL FUN FOR THE HARDCORE RISK-HEAD



Roller Coaster Tycoon

This could have been so good. Monopoly for theme park fans. Complex economic simulation, the need to juggle staff versus attractions versus amenities for guests. Unfortunately, the mob responsible for this conversion have focused far too heavily on the assumption that only kids would like roller coasters, and have thus

made a game for kids.

The dice are all things to all men. Visitors amble around your park according to the laws of random chance and occasionally hit up against one of your attractions, whereupon you get cash. Buying attractions in the first place is handled by an auction system, whereby you can choose to pay heaps of money for slow return, or scrimp and save and build-up slowly. Ultimately though it's all down to the dice, which is what happens when a game is designed so people who aren't good at it can have a chance at winning. Great to play with kids or as part of a drinking game. Not so good for Roller Coaster Tycoon fans.

OVERALL: SIMPLISTIC, RANDOM, AND AIMED AT THE KIDS. A REAL DISAPPOINTMENT



Jamie is pissing me off. We've both lucked out with awesome initial deployments and I can already see our two mighty armies coming to blows over the sea-link between Iceland and Greenland. Thing is, he doesn't want Europe and I don't want North America. But neither of us trusts the other enough to not talk some kind of diplomacy over this sticky border situation.

We retire to the kitchen, to discuss terms out of ear shot of the rest of the players. I'm frank and to the point:

"Jamie, we should have a treaty across that border, since if we fight each other it will only make us weaker against the others."

Jamie thinks, but not for very long.

"No, I don't think so. I reckon I can take you if you attack me next turn, so I don't see why I should have a treaty with you just so you can grow stronger and beat me in the endgame."

That's why he's pissing me off. I can't even for a moment fathom how he can leave himself open to such a risk. What if I get three-of-a-kind and suddenly dump ten more armies right on that border and then roll right across his continent? Why can't he SEE it? I'm getting more and more steamed, but he won't budge, not a bit. We go back into the dining room, brows furrowed, arms crossed, not speaking.

"Games that bring people together," says the company slogan on the side of the box.



Board 'em!

It's a lazy Sunday evening and a few people have come round to play Risk. It's truly the greatest table top wargame played by people who don't know what a "hex" is. Simple rules belie deep and involving gameplay. The designers knew, way back in 1959 when the game was first released, that all they needed to provide was a framework for conflict - humans would provide the rest of the complexity.

Modern PC games could learn a lot from Risk. The really successful games are still the ones that are essentially the simplest. Look at Doom 3. It appeals to such a broad spectrum because it looks great and it's simple.

But that's not to say that more complex games don't have a place too.

Board games and PC games have had a long association. Many early games for our platform were simple conversions of table top classics, such as Kingmaker and Space Hulk. Indeed, Games Workshop's wide and complicated family of fantasy and sci-fi table top games have been simulated time and time again on PC - take a look at Dawn of War due soon, based on the Warhammer 40,000 system.

It's probably because the board gamer and the PC gamer have so much in common - these days you'd probably be hard-pressed to find a

dedicated tabletop fan who didn't also dabble in PC. After all, these are gamers who are prepared to learn a few rules, spend a bit of time and invest in a more complex gameplay experience, with the return of a richer and more satisfying time at play.

Old school

A considerable portion of my youth, before PCs, was spent around a brightly printed board of some description. HeroQuest, Talisman, even the dry old staples of Monopoly and Journey Through Europe all provided hours of fun. And the multiplayer experience was second to none. Try playing Quake 3 with your six year old sister.

However, unlike videogames which are becoming a bigger and scarier industry by the month, board games slotted into a holding pattern in the 80s and haven't shifted much since then. Sure, the realities of modern marketing have reached this niche - viz. all those Lord of the Rings and Star Wars themed versions of Monopoly, Risk and Chess.



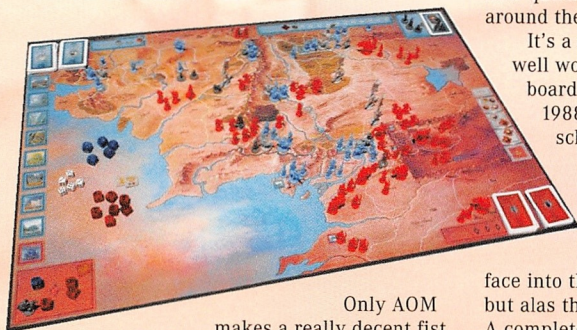
Boardgame designers knew that all they needed to do was provide a framework for conflict - humans would provide the rest of the complexity

But innovation still strive valiantly to be heard. A new Lord of the Rings game is due this year, called War of the Ring. Unlike other LOTR games which are just LOTR-branded versions of old stuff, this claims to be an all-new strategy game, similar but by no means identical to Risk.

Most of the really new stuff comes from Europe these days - games in small, neat packages that purport to have won all sorts of international prizes. Mostly, these titles - things like Aztec! or Maya! - are variations on central themes of arranging card hexes and stacking wooden blocks in an extremely abstract simulation of life in pre-Spanish South America.

Backwash

More amusingly, we are now seeing board games based on successful PC games appear on the shelves. In descending order, Age of Mythology, Civilization and Roller Coaster Tycoon all attempt to bring the PC experience back to the board.



Only AOM makes a really decent fist of it, since Civ is too cumbersome and Roller Coaster Tycoon is aimed at kids. Other major titles are just re-issues of old classics such as Axis and Allies, Trivial Pursuit and even Operation: Shrek Edition.

As many happy hours spent hunched around a Risk board arguing with my mates about whether a die roll should be counted if it lands slightly off-face on the edge of the board attest, board games are all about multiplayer. PC game design still has a lot to learn from the way in which board games use their design to facilitate high-level interaction between players.

Loaded dice

Designers are tempted to add more and more cards and dice and miniatures to make new board games seem more like PC games, but they forget that we just don't need all that crap, and in fact it gets in the way of good gameplay. The fewer the codified rules, the more capacity there is for house rules. Risk must be the most extensively modded board game I've ever played - simply changing the number of permitted reinforcement border crossings allowed at the end of each turn can dramatically change the pace of the game and how quickly the balance of power shifts around the map.

It's a different play experience but one well worth getting back into if the last board game you played was Monopoly in 1988 - and you were still in primary school.

As for the border dispute between Jamie and I, well I'd love to be able to say that I crushed him a scant handful of turns later and rubbed his recalcitrant face into the dirt of his triple-one dice rolls, but alas things just didn't turn out that way. A completely different and far more Machiavellian person won by blindsiding both of us from up out of the wilds of South American and Africa. But that's the beauty of the board game. You just never know how the dice will fall.

STRANGELY FAMILIAR...



Talisman

Is this the EverQuest of board games? Take control of a character and go on a quest with the ultimate aim of challenging and beating the "boss mob" in the centre of the board and getting an "epic" in the form of the Crown of Command. Like EQ, people love it or hate it and argue for hours about whether or not it's unbalanced and if the third edition is any good.

OVERALL: IF YOU LOVE CHARACTER MANAGEMENT, YOU'LL LOVE THIS. KIND OF LACKS DRIVE OTHERWISE



Axis & Allies

The latest version of this classic WW2 strategy game tweaks a bunch of the old rules, includes units from the Pacific expansion and now covers the whole world instead of just Europe. Lots of little plastic tanks and ships and planes and other nifty things make the game fun to look at, while clever design keeps it both historically plausible but also gives the Axis a good chance at victory. RTS eat your heart out.

OVERALL: ALWAYS A CLASSIC, THE NEW UPDATE MAKES IT A JOY TO PLAY AGAIN



HeroQuest

Has a surprising amount in common with Dungeon Siege - looks great, full of great things to fiddle around with, seems like an excellent idea on paper yet when you get into it you realise it's limited, simplistic and its replay value is inversely proportional to the amount of crap the designers put into it to make it replayable. There are expansions, which, also like Dungeon Siege, hardly anyone bought.

OVERALL: GOOD IDEA, BUT TOO LIMITED IN PRACTICE. ONE FOR THE KIDS

INTERNET.AU

The Internet...
unplugged



PEOPLE
TRENDS
TECH

FLAMES, LIES & POLITICS

<blink> ENTERTAINMENT </blink>

GAMES IN REVIEW

Expansion packs are strange beasts for a reviewer to encounter. In general they are really a no-brainer. Few add-ons drop the ball to such an extent that they offer an experience significantly inferior to the original. In the majority of cases, if you enjoyed the first one then you'll enjoy the expansion too.

United Offensive, the follow-up to last year's Game of the Year and the number one game on our most recent Top 100 list, doesn't depart from this formula. It is Call of Duty. Again. The battles are different and the objectives are fresh, but the essential gameplay is virtually identical.

So why did it fail to receive the same score and stupendous accolades?

Well it's shorter, for a start. Call of Duty was definitely not the longest game in the world, but it felt about right. The missions were well-paced and by the time you stormed the Reichstag in that memorable climax you felt satisfied. The war was over and you had accomplished what needed to be done. UO's finale will arrive a little bit sooner and thus perhaps leave you a little bit less satisfied.

Further, developer Gray Matter has opted to shift the design balance towards massive, scripted set-pieces at the expense of some of the freedom Call of Duty offered. The game's stricter, more frequent and more specific objectives certainly keep the action consistently intense – and the set-pieces never fail to be spectacular – but at times the guidance you're given is too heavy-handed. As a result, there's little room to breathe, let alone express



yourself in different ways.

That said, United Offensive is a worthy successor and, with its expanded multiplayer repertoire (sadly unavailable to test at the time of review) and mid-range price point, remains a very attractive proposition.

David Wildgoose,
Editor

68 Call of Duty: United Offensive

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72 Juiced

73 Arena Wars

74 Port Royale 2

76 Joan of Arc

78 Fairstrike

79 Catwoman

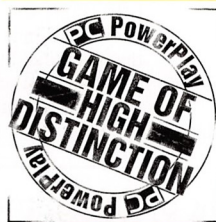
GOLD AWARD



The ultimate accolade. A game that receives a Gold Award is an essential purchase, and the only excuse for not owning it is either not having a powerful enough PC, or not having a PC at all. Or arms. It represents a new direction in gaming, a new benchmark against which all others will be measured. It defines its genre, or creates a new one. It is gaming. You must own it.

90+

HIGH DISTINCTION



This is the finest in gaming. A fresh concept, a perfect execution, a meaningful extension to a tried and tested format, one or all of these are required for this score. We strongly recommend the purchase of each High Distinction game, but extremely fussy gamers may want to skip those HD games that don't also receive Gold Awards.

85-100

DISTINCTION



An intriguing new concept or a bold new direction that manages to pull its new trick off with a reasonable degree of flair. You will be impressed, at either the graphics, the gameplay or some other new element that you may not have encountered before. Or perhaps this is a familiar gaming concept, but one executed so well it's almost – but not quite – an essential purchase.

75-84

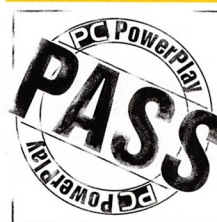
CREDIT



Solid, playable, largely bug-free, entertaining and maybe even a bit unexpected, these are the hallmarks of a game of Credit. You may have seen it all before, but you won't mind, because a Credit game does what it says on the box – it plays well and it keeps you hooked. An essential purchase? Not necessarily, but worth consideration.

65-74

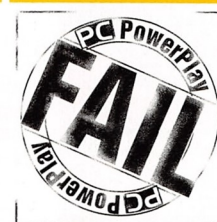
PASS



A game that receives a pass is playable, but its concept may be flawed, its extras may be lacking or its graphical enhancements may have fallen off somewhere in a lengthy bug-fixing process. And bugs there may be, although in the end the game will, as we say, work. Purchase if you're curious, but discerning gamers will probably look for something more substantial.

50-64

FAIL



There are more than 5000 games released each year. Some are gems. Some are merely unremarkable. Others are nothing more than a shameless grab for cash. Graphics will be rudimentary and gameplay will be worse. If you see someone considering a game that has failed, gently take them by the elbow and hurl them out of the shop. It's your duty as a good citizen.

0-49



Call of Duty: United Offensive

IT'S AN EXPANSION TO CALL OF DUTY, DONTCHERKNOW

Developer: Gray Matter ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Distributor: Activision ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

Call of Duty
700MHz CPU
128MB RAM
64MB Video card

WANT

1.7GHz+ CPU
512MB RAM
GeForceFX
2.1GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

cyberwise.gc.ca/eng/lis/home.html
Illegal and offensive content on the Internet. What's it all about? Here's a Canadian perspective.

The inevitable expansion to Call of Duty leads us to coin a new phrase. Disposable gameplay. This is where a single shot of action is delivered to you in a neat, exciting package, you perform the single task required, and move on to the next neatly packaged shot of action. Repeat, stitch together, and you have a game.

Now, this is not necessarily a bad thing. While United Offensive does feel more on rails than the original Call of Duty, the action is more intense, the set-pieces are grander and more dramatic and the sense of victory over the forces of evil is more pronounced.

In other words, if you loved Call of Duty, you'll love this.

That's a trite line, sure, but this is one of those games. Since you need COD to be able to play UO, you can take it as read that the game has been designed to appeal to COD fans, and perhaps reconvert a few folks for whom the original serving has gone cold. It's a second course, and while it is in many ways finer fare, you may already be too stuffed full of COD to appreciate it fully.

Die Eier von Satan...

I played UO as a newcomer to the COD experience. I have not finished the original game, although I did play it extensively

after flailing about in the expansion for a while. UO is indeed more of the same, but with the volume turned up.

Explosions are now more dramatic, thanks to new pyrotechnics effects. You can now "cook" a grenade by holding on to it after pulling the pin so to prevent your intended target from picking it up and throwing it back at you. There are more guns, more vehicles, new multiplayer modes and three new campaigns to sink your teeth into.

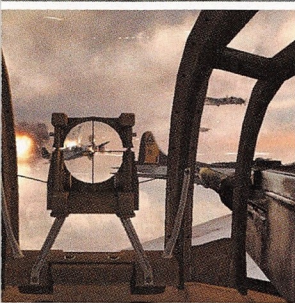
Careful examination of the details box

will reveal that UO is developed not by Infinity Ward but by champions of doing-someone-else's-game-with-their-guidance and Return to Castle Wolfenstein veterans Grey Matter.

You can tell that the developer has changed. Bennett spoke in his review of COD (PCPP#94) of the way the game did allow for some choice of pathway, and that events did happen differently according to the whims of some random number generator, but most of this has been discarded for UO.

Set pieces fill the bulk of the game... short, punchy sequences of combat followed by a spectacular denouement





IN A NUTSHELL

Want to know what to expect as you take the role of US, British and Russian grunts in this new game? Check it out:

US

Rejoin your old buddies in 101st Airborne in the Battle of the Bulge, dodge bullets, tanks, those helmets with the spikes on top, and try to liberate the Belgian town of Noville.

BRITISH

Strap yourself into the belly of a B-17 and try to shoot down German fighters as you sweep in toward Sicily and prepare to invade, all the while asking yourself the question: "where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?"

RUSSIAN

Fling away all the good guns and rush headlong into life as Russian cannon fodder, except this time you'll get your hands on T-34/85 tanks and play a starring role in the Battle of Kursk, one of the greatest tank battles of all time.

AUTHENTIC

Worried about how "real" the United Offensive experience really is? Relax, it's all in good hands. Gray Matter claims it has enlisted the services of "highly distinguished" military advisors, John Hillen and Hank Keirsey. They've been consulted on such esoterica as squad tactics, formations and the way real battlefields actually worked. While Hillen is an ex-paratrooper PhD with a doctorate in WAR, Keirsey kicks arse as a 24 year infantry veteran of the warrior cult. He defended Saudi Arabia against a presumed imminent Iraqi invasion in 1990, so expect Call of Duty: Sitting Around Waiting for the Iraqis To Attack Even Though They Eventually Won't on shelves soon.

Eine Spitze turkisches Haschisch

Set pieces fill the bulk of the game. They take the form of a short, punchy sequence of combat followed by a spectacular denouement such as an early Battle of the Bulge mission in which the player must defend a weakened line first with a pissy rifle, then with a .30 calibre, and finally with a Springfield sniper rifle.

"Keep your eye on that ridge line!" cries the Sarge, and after you've taken care of three or four machine gunners,

the USAF sweeps in and bombs the living crap out of the entire forest. The pyrotechnics are spectacular, with great plumes of snow thrown high into the air as fire belches deep in the guts of the mayhem.

Of course, it doesn't stop there. To the east, a German squad is overrunning the weakened lines. You've just enough time to charge up the hill, dispatch a few strays, grab an SMG, then jump into another hole where a handy bazooka lies waiting. Tanks roll out from behind the line of trees to the north, and it's up to you to dispatch them with the bazooka.

Bei 200 Grad fur 50 Minuten backen

So you can see how the game is broken up into little chunks: 1. Defend foxhole with rifle. 2. Change to .30 cal position and take out main infantry change. 3. Change to sniper position and take out MGs on ridge. 4. Charge up hill to bazooka. 5. Use bazooka on approaching tanks. After these steps are completed, the yanks' own armour rolls in and mops up the remaining forces.

You can still quicksave at any time, but automatic saves occur between most of the steps, so progression is fast. It may seem fragmented but because everything stitches together so seamlessly, it actually works.

Of course, the down side is fatigue.

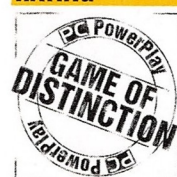
Everything is so intense all the time that you just get tired playing the game. Perhaps I'm the wrong kind of player, but I found it hard to invest more than 45 minutes without a break. Maybe Gray Matter has done it deliberately, thinking of our health. Who can say.

Und keine Eier

UO is what we expect from an expansion. It's not as long as the first game, but it's mostly as good and it has a few neat new things to reawaken your interest in an old favourite. It comes in handy bite-sized chunks which may irritate you in the way they compress your gameplay choices, but this design decision has allowed for a more spectacular and intense experience. If you're still hungry for COD action, then UO is a fine answer to the question: "please sir, may I have some more?"

Anthony Fordham

RATING



FOR

Pyrotechnics
Gameplay tweaks
More COD!

AGAINST

Even more scripted?
Limited choices
"Disposable
gameplay"

OVERALL

More COD, for COD
fans

84

Codename: Panzers

IS THIS THE SURPRISE HIT OF THE YEAR?

Developer: Stormregion ■ Publisher: CDV ■ Distributor: QV Software ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now



SYSTEM

NEED

750 MHz CPU
256MB RAM
32MB Hardware T&L
Video
2.1GB HDD

WANT

1.8 GHz P4 or Athlon
XP
512MB RAM
64MB Hardware T&L
Video

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.panzers.com
Watch the developers
gush over their
creation. Such self
congratulatory content
would be annoying if it
wasn't warranted.

When the review code for Codename: Panzers arrived in my hot little hands I can't say it was met with the usual level of enthusiasm I display upon receiving a new game to review. The past few months have seen a constant stream of mediocre, uninspired and in some cases, down right awful WWII RTS titles flood store shelves faster than a pre-teen girl on her way to a Guy Sebastian CD signing. With that in mind can a man be blamed for being apprehensive? Initial fears aside I am more than happy to say Codename: Panzers is not only an above par experience, it is the WWII RTS we have all been waiting for.

They may not form the core of a game but graphics are certainly the first things you will notice, especially when they are as high calibre as this. A lot of love has gone into the presentation of the Panzers world. You are not looking at an approximation of wartime Europe... this is wartime Europe. High resolution textures abound, ensuring that the unit models, buildings, vegetation and even the dirt roads are presented in a convincing manner. Nothing in this game is static, the world literally breathes. Large pines creak back and forth casting dappled shadows upon the soldiers that crawl through the underbrush and birds wheel through the air oblivious to the

Panzers creates a dynamic battlefield where you are encouraged to utilise adaptive play and are rewarded for being inventive

impending violence. It is like your own virtual sandpit of destruction and from the moment it loads up you can't help but feel captivated by the war unfolding before your eyes.

Tough choices

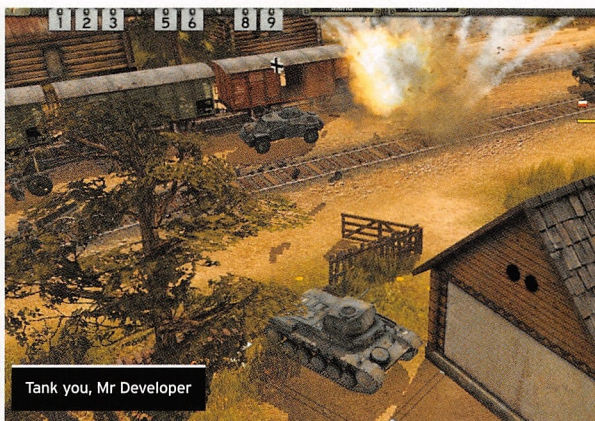
Thankfully, to use a tired cliché, Panzers is more than a pretty face. Despite borrowing a number elements from previous titles, Panzers rises above the norm in the way these elements interrelate to create a dynamic battlefield where you are encouraged to utilise adaptive play and rewarded for being inventive.

Cover and line of sight play an important role in the tactics of Panzers, forcing you to make tough choices regarding the way you approach objectives. Do you risk going across open ground and give yourself a clear view of potential threats or do you take the more stealthy approach, inching your men through forests and farm

houses, securing areas in a piecemeal fashion at the cost of situational awareness? Both options, and more, are equally valid but require different risks to be taken as a result.

Even the actual act of engaging in combat is rarely straightforward, once again presenting the player with a variety of choices. Granted you could use the powerful artillery cannons you mounted on top of a nearby hill to destroy incoming tanks and play it safe. Alternatively sending down a squad of flame throwers to heat up the tanks and forcibly eject the occupants is more risky but you could find yourself with a couple of empty tanks to commandeer as a result. The moments where you mindlessly rush the opposition are rare and your success will ultimately be determined by your own tactical prowess.

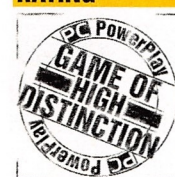
Another aspect to Panzers that enforces this tactical nature is the way it handles your troops. Eschewing the traditional 'pump-em-out' unit model of



GRAND THEFT PANZERS

One of the most enjoyable aspects of Panzers is the way it treats units and vehicles as separate but interrelated entities. As a tank slowly degrades under the pounding of your mortar fire you can expect the crew to get the hint and flee the wreck before it explodes. To shut down an artillery gun you don't need to destroy the weapon itself, just the people using it. This presents a situation where vehicles are both threats and opportunities. Use snipers to take out a gun placement's crew and there is nothing stopping you from making use of it yourself. Empty a tank, send in your own crew and claim it as your own. Panzers never leaves you feeling starved for choice.

RATING



FOR

Genuine tactical choices. Incredibly detailed graphics. Tank-jacking!

AGAINST

AI pathing can occasionally be off. Easy to lose troops hiding in woods. Uneven voice acting.

OVERALL

One can forgive the over-saturation of WWII games if it means that every once in a while a game like Codename: Panzers will result.

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Nathan Cocks

other RTS games, the troops you start with at the beginning of a campaign will, by and large, form the backbone of your army for the duration. Although the game will provide you with reinforcements during certain missions and at the completion of others, you are still strongly encouraged to keep these men alive. The core reason for this is that your troops will slowly gain experience out on the field and as they rise through levels their effectiveness increases. Lose the unit and lose the experience. The end result of this is that you will generally approach your objectives slowly, covering all possible eventualities to ensure that your prior efforts in keeping your men alive do not go to waste.

NOT WHAT I LEARNT IN SCHOOL

One aspect to Panzers that is bound to get a few noses out of joint is the way the German campaign starts out. If you studied your history books you will be shocked to learn in-game that it was Poland that attacked Germany first. Rather than being an exercise in revisionist history, it is justified in game by the fact you are a German commander and know only what the Nazi propaganda machine tells you. So don't write in your letters of complaint just yet.

An additional incentive for frugal troop expenditure is the accumulation of prestige. Upon completing each mission you are allocated a number of prestige points based on such factors as enemy units killed, units lost and objectives completed. These prestige points form the currency with which you may buy additional units to take on future missions.

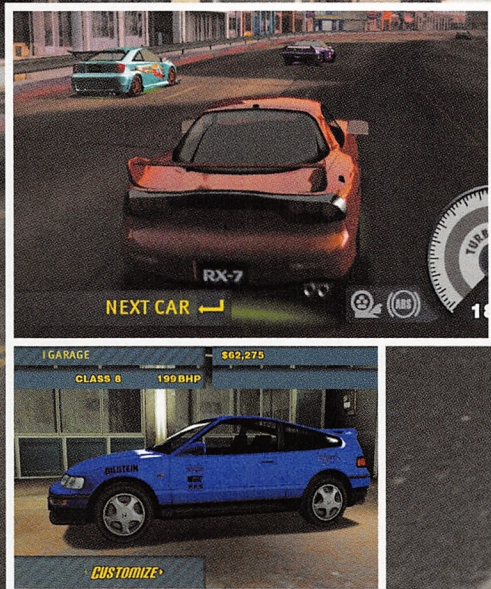
Conveniences

With so many options available to the player Codename: Panzers perhaps runs a serious risk of asking too much of the gamer. Thankfully just as much thought has gone into the interface as has gone into the battlefield mechanics. All commands are conveniently hot keyed in addition to being easily accessible from the command buttons which come complete with helpful tool tips. There are even a number of visual aides provided by the game to assist in your command. The restocking of vehicles or healing of troops by medics is shown by a cartoon like display of health/repair icons being pumped into the respective units. Far from being obtrusive it simply makes life easier. Icons will even pop up outside of field of vision to indicate that troops can hear the sounds of footsteps or rolling tanks, giving a clear visual indicator of incoming threats.

It is hard to fault Panzers, the game simply exudes a level of polish that few

titles can lay claim to. Most everything has been thought of. One issue that does rear its ugly head more than a few times was losing troops in forests. As cover is so important you'll often have a large number of men hiding in thickets. This can be problematic if you ever take your focus off that group as finding them again can be quite difficult. Outside of this and occasionally lacklustre voice acting there is little to prevent a hearty recommendation.

The thought of yet another WWII RTS may be enough to bring tears to your eyes but you would be doing yourself a major disservice if you passed Codename: Panzers by. If you're excited by the possibility of a game that spends more time testing your strategic thought processes than testing your mouse reflexes then you could do much worse than picking up a copy of Codename: Panzers.



Juiced

FAST CARS AND FRESH FRUIT?

Developer: Juice Games ■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Distributor: Acclaim ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

1.7 GHz CPU
256 MB RAM
64MB Video card

WANT

2 GHz+ CPU
512 MB RAM
128 MB Video card

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.boostjuicebars.com
They make a great Stress Relief smoothie.

Whatever you think of those hoons who burn down your quiet neighborhood street at three o'clock in the morning in cars that sound like jet engines, you can't deny the fact that they're obviously having a lot of fun doing so.

As you bury your head under the pillow, they're standing around admiring each other's exhaust pipes (er, yes) and discussing the merits of four pot calipers and coilovers (whatever). Just as you might get off on modding your PC, they're out there getting their knickers in a knot over a modded Golf GTI. Is there any real difference? Well, now you can buy Juiced and mod cars on your modded PC for the ultimate in convergent entertainment.

Instead of the cartoon depiction of car mod culture in Need For Speed: Underground, Juiced attempts to really simulate the true aspects of the "sport", making it a game that will no doubt thrill gamers who get into the real thing.

Juiced's career mode (where you will

spend 90% of your time) puts you in the shoes of a car head, out to start up their own crew in the streets of L.A. Instead of shooting at the other gangs, you race them and try to earn their respect, bet money on who will win at car meets and ultimately spend a shit load of money on a variety of cars, modding them to within an inch of their lives.

The mods possible in the game are very extensive, and actual manufacturer parts have been included, from Kenwood sound systems to Pirelli tyres. Of course, you have to spend your money wisely as you need to ante up in order to enter races, and if you're too crap to win a race yourself, betting money on other cars is a good way to get a few bucks back in your pocket. You start out only being able to afford a small selection of crappy cars under 200hp, but after successful racing



BULLIED TO BLOWOUT

Juiced's entertainment value multiplies when you play it multiplayer, for the simple fact that you can put together crews with your friends and take part in what are essentially "team races". All you need is for one of your crew to cross the finish line first to take the lion's share of the winnings. This results in careful tactics being employed by your other drivers, such as bullying opponent's cars into corners. You can also challenge other players to a pink slip race, in which the winner takes the other person's car. Spectators can bet their virtual money on the outcome too. And hey, a bit of online gambling disguised as gaming never hurt.

If you're too crap to win a race, betting money on other cars is a good way to get a few bucks

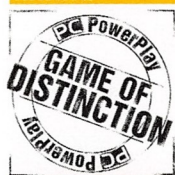
you'll have enough money to be putting 800+hp cars through their paces.

The actual racing is rock solid too, with decent car handling and realistic enough physics to get the job done. The game probably looks about on par with Microsoft's Project Gotham Racing 2, so there's just enough eye candy to keep you satisfied. The only real area that's a bit of a let down is the circuit design. Whilst there are a good variety of Los Angeles locations, from tight city streets to long stretches over bridges and along the waterfront, the tracks just aren't very interesting to drive. Your interest is really held purely on the events of the race, or if

you're taking part in a "show off" car meet, you'll be concentrating on how many donuts or powerslides you can pull off before the timer runs out.

Juiced is addictive because it offers a non-linear career structure. The speed of your car is determined by how well you mod it, and the calendar allows you to pick and choose the events you take part in. On top of that, you can build yourself the stupidest and ugliest cars ever seen in public, which is quite simply, unbeatable value.

RATING



OVERALL

Solid racer with an addictive structure and online options

84

Eliot Fish



Arena Wars

STRATEGY WITH A FAST AND FURIOUS FLAVOUR

Developer: Ascaron ■ Publisher: Tri Synergy ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$29.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: September

Arena Wars is a blast. It chucks RTS fluff and pretension out the window just leaving the good stuff: fast-paced action and underhanded tactics. This isn't so much as an RTS as a free-form team-sport with missile launchers.

Here's the set up: players have \$1000 or so, to buy units, then they get that money refunded as their guys get taken out. This takes the emphasis off stock piles and build queues and puts it squarely onto balancing your team on the fly and injecting them straight back into the action.

Buggy boy

You have six units to choose from and each has strengths and weaknesses as well as a limited use special ability. The lumbering tanks can teleport, the walkers can fly over obstacles and out of range of everyone but the Spiders and so on. While



some units are more expensive than others each plays a special role. The Buggy, which is your cheapest unit, fights like something that makes for a great day at the beach, but moves like lightning (which is great for grabbing flags or for rounding up power-ups), the tanks can wade through enemy fire but are vulnerable to Walkers, the Walkers are strong and fast but vulnerable to the Spiders and the Spiders pack a punch but don't have much defence and on it goes, all linking into a twisted web of dependence.

Striking effects

If you don't think you can out manoeuvre your foes with perfect counter units then you can try out think them with sneaky power ups. These spawn from hatches on the map (with a count down marking the wait) and once you tag them they appear on your screen until you use them. These things generally last from 10 to 30 seconds and do everything from making units invulnerable or invisible, reflecting damage, healing, adding turbo charge and calling in an orbital strike to global effects like a whole team slow, or the Virus that nukes the opponent's ability to build and mini-map vital moments.

These power-ups are amazingly nasty at the right time and they give players endless combinations for sneaky tricks, blindsides and counter-strokes.

The other major tactical shake up comes in the form of a Powerplant. If you don't protect it, you'll soon find all the guys in your base go bye-bye and your enemy will have a clear shot until your production centre comes back online.

This might all sound simple, and it is, but it's simple like a single piece of Lego. The maps are well-designed, it comes with an editor, you have two-on-two team games, integrated voice and web cam support, a handy AI (for when people aren't about), and it's all wrapped in a cool stripped-bare techno vibe.

The three game types each provide a different challenge, and these multiplied by the maps, unit combinations, team tactics and power-ups equals plenty of ways to punish unsuspecting foes.

It's fast, it's frantic and it's just the thing for people starting to get jaded with big RTS titles and looking for something with a multiplayer slant. For cheap thrills with options for a deeper relationship, give it a look.

Timothy C. Best

MORE THAN JUST FLAGS

The three games modes are Capture the Flag, Bombing Run and Double Domination. CFT is standard: you score points by getting the enemy flag back to your base without having them nick yours.

For Bombing Run you have to score a touchdown with a bomb and then protecting it while it ticks down from 20. If you let the other team steal it, the clock stays where it is meaning that last second saves equal no defence time back at the other bomb zone.

In DD you have to hold two zones at the same time by taking the enemy key to one then the other. After 20 seconds you score unless the steals it back with one of your keys. It all sounds so simple doesn't it?

SYSTEM

NEED

700MHz CPU
256Mb RAM
32Mb Videocard
250Mb HDD space

WANT

1GHz+ CPU
512Mb Ram
128Mb Video card

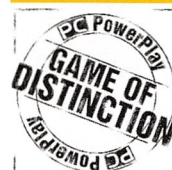
MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.lego.com/
The Lego homepage, one piece alone is a choking hazard; many equal a working scam jet.

RATING



OVERALL

Surprisingly addictive
old school fun with
new school bang

83



Port Royale 2

SID MEIER'S PIRATES DOCKS EARLIER THAN EXPECTED

Developer: Ascaron ■ Publisher: Ascaron ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

700Mhz CPU
128Mb RAM
32Mb Videocard
700Mb HDD space

WANT

1GHz+ CPU
64Mb Video card

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.cojoweb.com/blackbeard.html
Learn all about Edward Teach, the guy with the blackest of beards.

It's all about the booty. Or the bling ... or a time when booty and bling were the same thing and the only rap you'd ever get was across the back of the head. Yes, we're talking pirates and the high seas. In fact, with Port Royale 2, we are talking about pretty much every aspect of free trade in the Caribbean during the 17th century.

It really takes a stab at a bit of everything, modelling an economy for trade, having a form of base building so you can own manufacturing facilities to corner the market, it has RTS battles to capture towns, RPG-style side quests, Captain progression and even some little reflex-based duelling game.

Ship-to-ship

The wide net of Port Royale 2 is its greatest strength and greatest weakness. You'll love the scope of the game but you'll probably find the rough sketch treatment of some things even vaguely amusing (like the RTS and duelling modes).

Without a doubt the economic side of things and the plots it allows are the strongest suit of the game, with the real-time ship-to-ship combat trailing along

behind. Naval warfare is detailed but shows the strain of sharing the stage with so many other elements.

The 16 ship-types have a bunch of neat stats like speed, agility, hit points, number of cannons, troop capacity and even optimum firing angle all which come into play as you steer them around the battle field. When you add wind to the battle map you get some cool opportunities for cat and mouse, the problem comes in that the game rigs the whole thing.

Sailing solo

Players can only fight with one ship at a time (which flees when you tag in your next vessel), while the computer can field its full complement of up to five warships at once. This seriously cramps your tactics. While it's easy to out sail one opponent, and avoid being boarded, it's really tough to play tag with five ships. This means that if they have more soldiers on their ships you're in big trouble. Even if you have the numbers, enemy ships can still shoot you during boarding to help strip away your advantage. All of this also means you'll spend a lot of time scurrying from port to

SCENARIOS ROYALE

All of the flexibility and scope of Port 2 could bury the unwary, but that's where the scenarios shine. The first four lead you through individual aspects of the game (trade, manufacture and combat), so that you have an idea of what tools are at your disposal. The advanced scenarios culminate in such sweeping objectives as tracking down the infamous Black Beard or single-handedly turning it around for a small town that seems well and truly cursed.

The scenarios all add something to game, and even the final parts of the training missions even provide quite a challenge (bordering on frustration if you're not willing to take some short cuts to meet all the conditions).

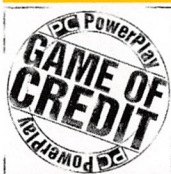
port to resupply your stock of soldiers.

Other than this piece of rigging, everything else is largely ship-shape. While it also skimps on playing as a pure pirate, Port 2 packs 60 cities, 19 tradable goods, and a free play mode that's pretty darn free. Business moguls can corner the market and starve cities producing rival goods; governors can found their own towns, captains can hunt the deadliest scourges of the sea and patriots can change the tides of wars. If you just want to trade, follow up the side missions or chase treasure maps then that's cool too. The reactive economy and reactive military factions allow for all of this.

Port Royale 2 creates a living world vibe and, what's cooler, lets the player carve their name into it. People looking for Pirates of the Caribbean will find it a tad dry, but big-picture players should have a whale of a time.

Timothy C. Best

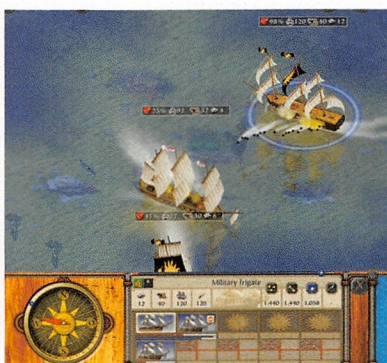
RATING



OVERALL

The big picture is great but the details are a little blurry.

74



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War & Warriors: Joan of Arc

TAKING IT TO THE ENGLISH PIG DOGS

Developer: Enlight Software ■ Publisher: Enlight Software ■ Distributor: QV Software ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

800Mhz processor
256Mb RAM
Geforce 2/ ATI+
1.1Gb HDD space

WANT

1.5GHz+
64Mb Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.fromages.com/
The best of French cheese.

Here's the dream: a masterful RTS game, where players can leap into the middle of the action and turn the tide of battles through their fast-twitch heroics. It's a nice dream and there are nice moments in Joan of Arc when you charge around pulling your followers from the frying pan. You're collecting dropped gold and health boosts and doling them out to keep you and your troopers in the game. There's the big thrill of taking a castle by force, blowing a hole in the wall with your cannons, and then sweeping up into the battlements to clear the archers as your other troops attack the main force in the court yard.

Unfortunately, marrying the great houses of RTS and third-person action is not easy, and Frankenstein-obvious seams provide plenty of annoying wake-up calls. Joan, for example, can jump, but she can't jump over things. When you have a tiny wall being an insurmountable obstacle, having a jump key (and the corresponding cheesy jump attack) just makes you mad.

Then you have the AI which has flaws from both RTS and action camps to draw on. In melee, the enemy always attacks where you were standing, so they never hit you if you keep moving. You only run into problems if they surround you, there

is a bucket load of archers (that you can't outshoot with your bow) or there is a cheating enemy general making the most of his super attacks. All of the general characters – including the ones you can control – get these super attacks, but to make the English scum more of a challenge, they seem to become invulnerable once their super combo starts, have moves that follow and cover a lot of ground, and have routines start with almost no warning.

Lazy bones

It's cheap, but it's predictable and fairly easy to avoid while you are in control. This is especially true since the game takes more than five hours of solid play time to get near to the RTS section ... so you'll be pretty good at dodging by then. Unfortunately, your stupid troops aren't so well trained. Enemy super-combos tear through your computer-controlled troops and generals alike.

This leads to a situation where you have to be fighting in action mode to avoid heavy losses, but that means completely surrendering control of your army to the basic game AI which makes all of your troops either eagerly suicidal, or bone lazy, depending on the range of the nearest enemy. There are no

ACTRESS ENVY

I'll admit right now that I didn't get to the end of the game to see if the French screw Joan and we see her burnt at the stake, but I did see enough to realise that the treatment of Joan was cheesy. While some the locations and battles might be borrowed from history, there's lot of good mood going to waste. There's not enough grit, she doesn't spout off about God half as much as she should and the English are so over-the-top evil that they might as well be wearing black hats and holding signs saying "yes, we are English pig-dogs". When you put together a Joan product like this you really need Milla Jovovich or Leelee Sobieski on board. It's a rule or something.

aggressiveness settings at all in either mode, unless you count the ability to make certain generals and their troops "inactive" so they won't move.

Something as simple as a horn to call nearby generals to your aid or a reform/retreat command would have helped to help bridge the gap between action and strategy, but there's none of that.

I understand that it's a design decision to make players choose between battle prowess and control, but the bad path-finding and the limited AI in the strategy mode just can't support a call like that.

There are a lot of elements to recommend Joan, like castle assaults, the RPG development of generals, and multiple strategic approaches to maps, but the pretty bunting can't prop up a cracked foundation.

Timothy C. Best

RATING



OVERALL

This action/RTS
combo just cuts too
many corners.

54



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Fair Strike

AND A FAIR REVIEW

Developer: Buka ■ Publisher: GMX ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

Win98/Me/XP
PIII 800 MHz
256 MB RAM
32 MB Video
1760 MB HD

WANT

PIV 1.8 GHz or
equivalent
512 MB RAM
64 MB Video

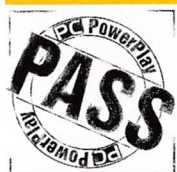
MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.militaryfactory.com/
Probably the best
online reference for
all sorts of military
equipment including
attack choppers.

RATING



OVERALL

Military themed
vallum. A total bore.

53

Fair Strike, despite the name similarity and chopper focused content, has nothing to do with the addictive isometric arcade shoot em ups of gaming yesteryear; the Desert Strike series. Which is a shame really because what we have instead is a flawed attempt at simulation, all wrapped up in a clichéd little 'win the war on terror' style storyline.

To be fair, Fair Strike isn't a total loss. With 30 branching missions and a somewhat pretty (though poorly optimised) graphics engine it is obvious the development team was at least trying to make a game worth your hard earned cash. They simply didn't succeed particularly well.

In a dubiously confident move Fair Strike plays both sides of the sim fence, by allowing you to play it as an 'accurate' simulation of modern airborne combat or an arcade action title. I say 'dubiously confident' since the end result of such an attempt is that neither approach is particularly well realised. The arcade

mode lacks the intensity that an action title needs if it is going to get away with a simplistic flight model and the simulation mode subscribes to the 'simulation just means making things a bitch to control' theory of game design.

After your particular mode of play has been settled on, the game takes you through a lengthy and incredibly dull mission briefing before moving on to the game proper. It is here you finally get to jump into the cockpit of your chosen whirlybird of destruction. In an effort to inject a level of variety into the game, Fair Strike provides six gunships you can take out on sorties. Unfortunately there seems little reason to give a damn what you are flying outside of cosmetic ones, as the choppers all control exactly the same... badly. The choppers simply don't control realistically. There is no sense of inertia or momentum, leaving you feeling like you're flying a paper cup.

If Fair Strike can be summed up in one word it is 'bland'. Once you overcome

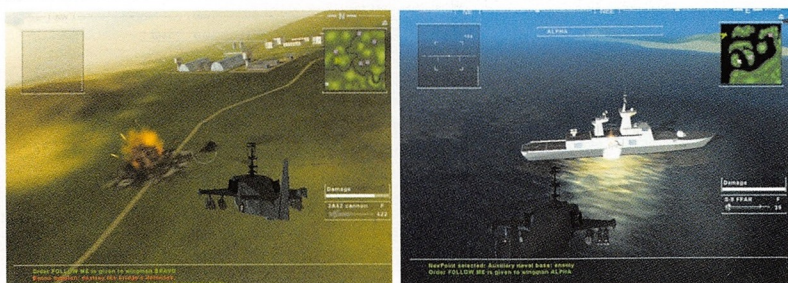
KILL' EM ALL!!!

Special mention simply has to be made regarding the overwhelmingly testosterone charged promotional language used to advertise Fair Strike. I don't know who the marketing genius behind this spiel is but one wonders how they kept a straight face during the presentation. 'Terrorists! Awful guys, whose basic aim in life are killing fellow creatures and developing their drug business. But you are not that sort of person, of course, instead you pilot a super realistic and authentic model of a modern military helicopter as part of united multinational antiterrorist force with only one task: Kill 'em all!

the game's numerous shortcomings you realise it just isn't particularly exciting. There is just no sense of being involved in life or death combat. Instead you are relegated to painting objects from afar, firing a missile and counting down from 3 until you see the explosion. Tracer fire patters about your gunship like mosquitoes and seems to carry the same amount of wallop.

It isn't that the core gameplay of the title is aggravating, or even conceptually flawed. It is just boring. Missions lack variety and there are only so many times you can sit just outside of range of an enemy base whilst systematically unloading warheads at distant targets without needing to stifle a yawn. Controlling a several million-dollar piece of military hardware should be an exciting experience but Fair Strike somehow manages to make it a tiresome one.

It isn't particularly exciting... there is just no sense of being involved in life or death combat

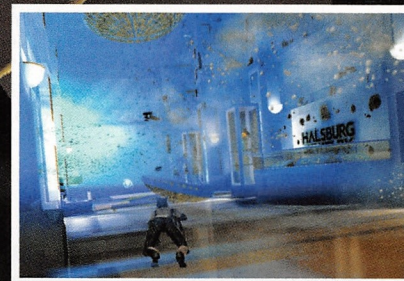


Nathan Cocks



Catwoman

ALL BLINGED UP AND NOWHERE TO GO



Developer: EA ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

There are good reasons why people don't like 3D jumping puzzles and this game puts them all together and adds a pretty bow, but I should probably start at the beginning...

Catwoman is based on the movie where a Hollywood bombshell turns super-agile little kitty and pounces all over the big screen. The pouncing obviously worked for the guys at EA because that's what this game is all about.

Unlocking the best way to use our bombshell's acrobatics skills forms the heart of the game. She can jump a certain distance, can run up walls a bit further and can leap upwards between parallel walls to any height. What's more, our Catwoman loves swinging around poles like an out-of-work gymnast and has a whip that allows her to latch onto certain objects, even in mid-jump, and swing on to victory. As the jumping puzzles get harder you'll find that you have to combine more of these moves



to make it through.

Beyond jumping, there are some camp combat sequences where no-one gets killed but guys fly into boxes, through windows, off ledges and into interactive junction boxes and other electrical devices. This helps fold some pretty decent switch-flipping neatly into the action.

Litter tray

If this all sounds kind of peachy, that's because I haven't got to the control scheme and camera angles, both of which belong in the litter box.

The biggest problem comes with trying to use the WASD keys for a game that really wants an analogue thumbstick. To get away from that computer game look, virtually all of the scenery is at non-forty five degree angles to the camera which has the great side-effects that a) you're not sure which direction button best lines things up and b) that you often have to zig-zagging up and down even straight walkways, or risk running clean off the edge.

The runner-up for the "Miss Problematic" award goes to our camera. It seems intent on showing off the scenery and giving you great shots of our feline



femme's fine figure without a care about what you're actually trying to do.

Besides leaving you blind now and again, this also means you have to edge through the game, since one camera change can alter your athletic sprint down a walkway into a manic charge towards the edge. The best game-pad in the world isn't going to help you here.

Blundering

Finally, there are several little things that round out the joy like regularly having to hold down three buttons at once, having to blunder through certain levels as Catwoman is chased by gun fire and level design that takes artistic license with your jumping ability.

Okay, it's not all bad. The game does look pretty sweet, capturing both Halle Berry's sultry slink and the DC comic's feel and, even with the console trappings, there's something a little smooth about the whole presentation. Don't be fooled; the lack of consideration for people actually playing the game means the good stuff is stretched almost as thin as Catwoman's outfit.

Timothy C. Best

SYSTEM

NEED

800MHz CPU
256MB RAM
64MB Videocard
1.5GB HDD space

WANT

1.5GHz CPU
Analogue game-pad

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

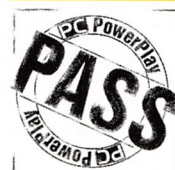
<http://pw2.netcom.com/~mwomack/>
Check out Catwoman in the comics. She's good there.

SLINK SELLS

Cats are often portrayed as sensual critters and the Catwoman movie, and game, plays this to the hilt. Halle Berry's voice purrs in all the right places and her hip-swinging walk has been motion captured to great effect. There's even a "Pose" move in the game where Catwoman does a little wiggle (that I think she learnt from a belly-dancer) which has the chance of making a guard go goo-goo over her. She's so good that it works in the middle of a fight, and it's called a "Domination" move.

Even if you take a hand's off approach, the camera will start a guided tour of Catwoman's curves as a sort of in-mission screen saver. We know where the effort went in this one.

RATING



OVERALL

The controls equal
Codwoman-like
grace

55

POINTS OF VIEW

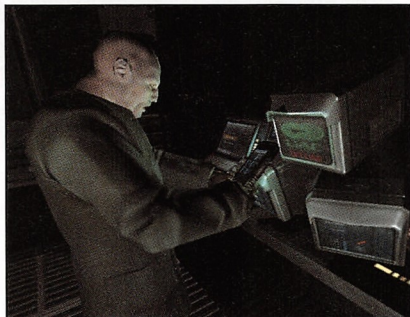
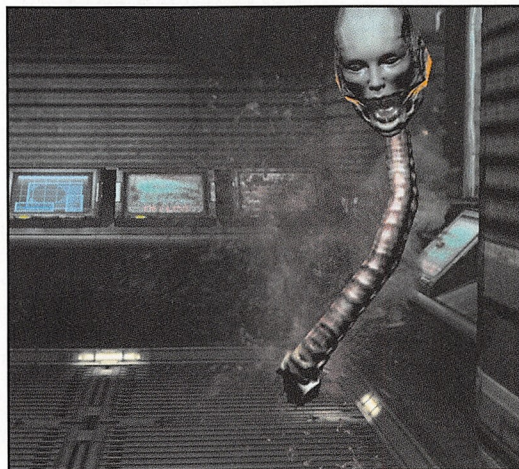
A second look at the most significant releases of the past few months



Doom 3

When David noted that Doom 3 has "an ever-present sense of menace", he hit the nail on the head. It's claustrophobic, but in a very entertaining pants-wetting way. The fact that it continues to frighten me even when I'm doing nothing but walking down a hallway and reacting to noises, says a lot about how convincing the gameworld is and how well-paced and structured the action is. Some people have criticised Doom 3 for becoming repetitive, but that's akin to saying id Software got lazy when designing the levels and plotting the action, which is far from the truth. Being perpetually frightened by sudden shocks, even if you're trying to second-guess the next one, is what makes it so tense - and intense - to play. Doom 3 just keeps on fooling you. I never stopped believing in the gameworld to start looking for design flaws - every game has them, so why not just sit back and enjoy the ride while it lasts?

Eliot Fish



Doom 3

Doom 3 is the scariest game I've ever played. I've lost count of the number of times I've jumped out of my seat. And for the first four or five hours of play, I agreed with the general consensus that this is the greatest shooter ever made. But then I noticed something. Doom 3 is also one of the most repetitive games to have hit the PC in quite some time.

90% of the gameplay is based around walking through small rooms joined by claustrophobic corridors. Enter the room, wait for the lights to dim, take out the inevitable onslaught of demonic foes. Walk for a minute or so through an empty area, building up tension via suitably spooktacular sound effects, and then the cycle starts all over again. Only two sections spring to mind as adding a little variety to the gameplay; the monorail ride and entering Hell.

Yet, surprisingly, the game still remains gripping. The scares keep working, even though you know exactly what's going to happen. It's testimony to how well the limited amount of gameplay is designed that you rarely get sick of it. In my opinion it's not the finest shooter ever made, but it comes close.

Now if only we could combine the highly polished sheen and artistic flair of Doom 3 with the varied action and clever AI of FarCry, we'd have the perfect shooter. Which is hopefully what Half Life 2 will turn out to be...

Bennett Ring

Doom 3

To be honest I can't say I was expecting great things from Doom 3. Call me cynical but I've always viewed each id release with a degree of apprehension. I can't fault their ability to design engines but I don't consider their ability to develop a game to be of the same standard. Well not until Doom 3 anyway.

Upon first stepping foot onto Martian soil I was totally sold by what id has created. I may not be quite ready to proclaim it best shooter ever but I heartily agree with David's core observations about the game. Doom 3 is an exceptional first-person shooter that takes you in its demonic clutches and does not let go until the last hellspawn has fallen. It is an incredibly kinetic experience that showcases the best aspects of early shooters and updates them for the modern gamer.

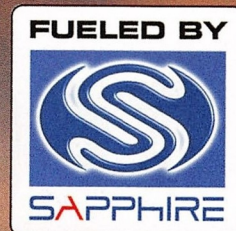
Nathan Cocks



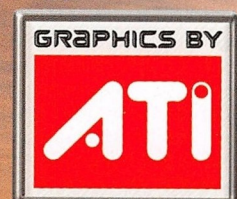
Doom 3

Best PC shooter ever? Perhaps not, but certainly an essential game and worthy of its gold award. You might think id Software is a little cheeky for making more or less the same game as they did 10 years ago except with better graphics but Doom 3 is more than that. It will be a benchmark by which we judge the next generation. Some call it repetitive. I'd say it's not meant to be played in a massive 10 hour binge. Some call it logically inconsistent. I say, have we come so far from what we love about games? Ten years ago we were happy to run through abstract space bases picking up blue designer vases as "health bonuses" using guns with infinite clips, but now we're worried about how the flashlight works? Nah mate, Doom 3 is great. Play it now.

Anthony Fordham



Intoxicating features without the hangover



TOXIC X800 PRO VIVO

- A.P.E. Extends memory operating frequency to pre-tested levels that far surpass the competition
- TMR (Temperature Monitoring Ready Technology) allows for output to display (not included) of TOXIC cards temperatures
- Lethal Cooling provides the definitive cooling solution for the overclocker while remaining quiet
- 256MB of 'Xtreme performance GDDR3 memory accelerates the latest cutting edge 3D applications
- 256-bit quad-channel GDDR3 memory interface
- Twelve 'Xtreme parallel pixel pipelines
- Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard, providing a high-speed link between the graphics board and the rest of the PC
- Six programmable vertex shader pipelines



RADEON X800 PRO

- 256MB of Xtreme performance GDDR3 memory
 - 256-bit quad-channel GDDR3 memory interface
 - Twelve Xtreme parallel pixel pipelines
 - Six programmable vertex shader pipelines
 - True High Definition (HD) gaming
- Features: New SMARTSHADER™ HD technology, SMOOTHVISION™ HD technology, 3Dc™, Unique VIDEOShader™ HD and HYPER Z™ HD



RADEON 9800 SE

- 128MB DDR memory with 128-bit memory interface
 - 4-pipeline VPU in its 2nd generation
 - Supports the new AGP 8X standard, providing a high-speed link between the graphics board and the rest of the PC (2.0 GB/sec)
- Features: SMARTSHADER 2.1, SMOOTHVISION 2.1, VIDEOShader and FULLSTREAM



RADEON 9600XT

- 256MB DDR high performance two-channel DDR memory interface
 - Optimised 128-bit 2D engine supported by 4 rendering pipelines and 2 geometry engines
 - Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard, DirectX® 9.0 and OpenGL®
- Features: SMARTSHADER 2.0, SMOOTHVISION 2.1 technology



RADEON 9600 SE

- 128MB DDR memory with 64-bit memory interface
 - 4-pipeline VPU in its 2nd generation
 - Supports the new AGP 8X standard, providing a high-speed link between the graphics board and the rest of the PC (2.0 GB/sec)
- Features: SMARTSHADER 2.1, SMOOTHVISION 2.1, VIDEOShader and FULLSTREAM



RADEON 9550

- Next Generation Performance with 256MB onboard memory
 - Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard, True Microsoft® DX9 Performance for today's games and full support for the latest OpenGL® functionality
- Features: VIDEOShader and FULLSTREAM



RADEON 9250

- 128MB or 256MB of 400MHz DDR memory
 - 128-bit or 64-bit memory data path interface
 - ATI RADEONT 9250 VPU operating at 240 MHz
 - Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard
 - Four pixel shader pipeline
 - Microsoft® DirectX® 8.1 and DX9 compliance and the latest OpenGL® functionality
 - Integrated DV support for Flat Panel displays
 - Powered by CATALYST™ – The industry's most stable unified graphics software
- Features: SMARTSHADER, VIDEO IMMERSION and FULLSTREAM



RADEON 9200 SE

- 128MB DDR memory
 - Driven by Quadpipe architecture
 - Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard, DirectX® 9.0, OpenGL® functionality
 - VIVO (Video-in and Video-Out)
- Features: SMARTSHADER, SMOOTHVISION, VIDEOShader and FULLSTREAM

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TECH IN REVIEW

This month sees our whopper, jumbo, mega, massive, super sized graphics card PowerTest come to a conclusion. I'll be quite happy if I never see one of these blasted things again. Hopefully it's given you guys a good idea of how each chipset performs, which was our intention. Now it's up to you to find your chosen graphics card at the best possible price.

We've taken another look at the GeForce 6800GT this month, as we didn't want this exceptional performer to get lost amongst the clutter of the PowerTest. As you'll see from the review this card tears up the \$700 price point like Thorpey in a pool full of Americans. It also performs beautifully in Doom III, but we wouldn't really recommend buying a card based on a single game - thankfully the 6800GT has plenty of power for other games as well.

Jason had fun giving AMD's new budget processor, the Sempron, a nice thrashing, but unfortunately Intel wouldn't supply a Celeron chip to compare it with. Their actions speak volumes about how well a Celeron would compare to AMD's budget buddy.

It's not often that a power supply unit gets us all hot and bothered, but the Antec NeoPower isn't your stand PSU. Head to page 96 to see just why James wants to spend the rest of his life worshipping boxes with lots of power cables coming out of them.

Just before we went to print the Counter-Strike: Source Beta was released, and this includes a video stress test based on the Source engine (which is the engine used by Half Life 2). Next month we'll take a look at a range of cards to



see how they perform in this new benchmark, but from early results that have been posted online it looks like ATI has a nice lead.

Bennett Ring
Deputy Editor
bennetttr@next.com.au

- 92 Benq FP783 17" LCD Monitor
- 92 Sharp XV-Z10E Digital Projector
- 94 Leadtek GeForce 6800 and 6800GT
- 96 Creative Zen MP3 player
- 96 Antec NeoPower PSU
- 98 AMD Sempron CPU
- 100 Plantronics Audio 45 USB headset
- 100 Oporite DD1203 DVD burner

HOW WE TESTED

For an in-depth explanation of how we test video cards, CPUs, and motherboards head to our PowerTools section on page 102. You'll also see a list of hardware that makes up the PCPP testbenches, which are used for the testing of the majority of our hardware.

Where possible we use benchmarks based on real world games to test hardware performance; this way we know for sure which component will give you the best gaming experience. We don't love hardware for hardware's sake - it's all about using this hardware to make your entertainment

even more, well, entertaining. We also try to compare the review product with the current "best of class" piece of hardware, so at the end of the day you'll know exactly which product offers you the best bang for buck.

For a product to earn a Power Award, price be damned, we're just looking at how this product performs. If there's nothing better, that we've seen at least, it'll get the Power Award. However, if a product offers a great level of performance or features for a very reasonable price, it'll get the Value Award. Simple, really.



TO HELL AND BACK



>>HOW YOUR HARDWARE WILL PERFORM IN DOOM 3

Doom 3 is an expensive game. We're not talking about the price of the actual software, nor the adult-sized nappies necessary after a particularly scary Imp attack. It's the hardware purchase required to see the game in all its glory that's hurting gamer's wallets. Anecdotal proof of this is the fact that two weeks after the game hit store shelves, five people from the Next offices ordered brand new video cards. Our DVD god Amos even purchased a ninja PC to see just what had turned David and I into the gibbering, quivering mess of nerves we'd become.

As the prettiest game yet seen on the PC, we thought you might like to see how a variety of hardware configurations handles the Doom III engine. We gathered up a nice selection of mid to high end cards, and put them through their paces.

When testing video cards it's necessary to limit the CPU as a bottleneck, so a 3.4GHz Pentium 4 was used. This was installed on an Intel 875 chipset based motherboard with a clean installation of Windows XP Professional. A gigabyte of DDR400 memory was used - with 512MB the game often accesses the hard drive, causing stuttering.

Benchmarking in Hell

Doom 3 has a simple to use benchmarking procedure built into it. The following steps describe it's used:

1 Start the game and select the resolution and image quality settings that you wish to test. It's very important to make sure vertical sync is disabled in both the game control panel as well as your video card's OpenGL control panel, as this can have a massive performance decrease if left on. Exit the game and then restart it, as Doom 3 doesn't allow you to change resolutions without restarting the game. Don't ask us why, as it's a bit of a pain in the posterior, but if Carmack designed it this way it must be for a good reason.

2 Hit Ctrl, Alt and the ~ (next to the 1 key on the top left of your keyboard) at the same time to bring down the console.

3 Enter "timedemo demo1" to run the prerecorded demo that ships with the game.

4 Depending on your hardware and game settings, this can take anywhere between 20 seconds and a couple of minutes to run.

5 Once the demo has completed, a small window will pop up with the

average frames per second that the game ran at. Discard this first result, as it's much slower the first time the game is run at a chosen resolution.

6 Repeat step 3, and you'll now have an accurate indicator of the game's performance.

It's possible to record your own demos as well but we found that the included demo was adequate, as it includes plenty of creatures, lighting effects and shadows. However, due

benchmark result of 75 frames per second is really no better for Doom 3 than a card that scores 60 frames per second. 60 fps is the speed they're both going to be running at when playing the game, right? Unfortunately for the slower card this isn't the case - the frame rate that the benchmark returns is the average frame rate over the entire demo playback. This means that at times both cards will be running

Two weeks after the game hit store shelves, five people from the Next offices ordered brand new video cards

to the small size of the rooms in this demo, texture usage isn't as high as some of the larger areas of the game, and this impacted one area of our tests - more about that later.

When playing Doom 3, the framerate is locked at sixty frames per second, as this stops various exploits that were evident in previous id engines. When using the timedemo command this artificial framerate ceiling is disabled. This might lead you to think that a card that scores a

well below their average frame rate, but the faster card will experience this less than the other card.

Now that you know how it all works, let's see how these cards perform in the depths of Hell. (thanks to [H]ardOCP for their descriptions of each quality level - www.hardocp.com)

Medium Quality

We skipped low quality altogether - sorry, but we're not going to permit the beauty of Doom 3 to be tarnished

TO HELL AND BACK



by such a wimpy setting. Medium quality is definitely a step up in the visual stakes, as you can see from our screenshots. According to [H]ardOCP, this setting "still compresses specular, diffuse, and normal maps, but it does not downsample any textures or specular maps". It also increases the number of sound samples per effect - but our soundcard-less testbench wouldn't have noticed this.

As you can see from the benchmark results, all of the high end cards maintained similar framerates when running at 1024 x 768. It was only as the resolution increased that the GeForce 6800 based cards started to pull further ahead of the other cards. The slowest card to maintain a playable framerate was the GeForce FX5900. Sadly for owners of the RADEON 9600XT and GeForce FX5700 cards, neither of these provided a playable framerate.

High Quality

To run this setting it's best to have 256MB of onboard memory on your video card, as well as the grunt to make use of this. Having said that, faster 128MB cards won't squeal in agony when running the High Quality setting. This setting only compresses the specular and diffuse lighting, and also automatically enables 8X anisotropic filtering. Once again the 6800 based cards had the lead, but surprisingly the X800 cards closed the gap somewhat. The 9800XT remained a viable option for this setting, but the FX5900 called it a day.

Ultra High Quality

This is as good as Doom 3 gets - there is no compression of any of the various elements that make up the graphical prowess of this engine. As a result id recommends that only owners of video cards with 512MB of onboard memory should try this setting. Yet our results for this setting were identical to the High Quality results. What gives? Remember we mentioned that the demo1 recording didn't make use of a high amount of textures? It's for this reason that the Ultra High Quality setting didn't perform any differently. Real world

performance in Doom 3 isn't the same though, as there's noticeable stuttering when entering new areas and as doors open. However, owners of the high end cards should still be able to get away with using Ultra High Quality.

Just like the High Quality results, the 6800GT and Ultra both take the lead in this benchmark. Note that during gameplay we didn't notice an image quality difference between High and Ultra High quality, so we recommend sticking with High Quality to avoid framerate hiccups.

I damn you jaggies to Hell!

Doom 3 is a strange one when it comes to anti-aliasing. Due to the low-contrast of the dark levels, aliasing is less noticeable than in other games. This means that some gamers will prefer to raise the resolution of the game rather than run with anti-aliasing enabled. However, after playing the singleplayer game for an extended period we still think that it looks better with antialiasing enabled.

Once again the cards all performed in an identical order when anti-aliasing is enabled, with the 6800GT and Ultra having a significant lead over the rest of the pack.

Shoot it in the brains

We would have liked to have tested on both AMD and Intel hardware, but the fact that I'm not a cyberdemon who can work at the speed of light didn't permit this. So all CPU tests were conducted on our multiplier unlocked 3.4GHz Pentium 4. Because of the multiplier unlocking we were able to run the CPU at various speeds; 1.6GHz, 2.4GHz and 3.2GHz. Two video cards were used to test at these speeds; a high end 6800GT and the mid-range 9800XT.

With the 6800GT in place the performance scaled upwards as the CPU speed increased when set to 1024 x 768 and 1280 x 1024. This scaling dropped off at 1600 x 1200, indicating that if you've got a high end card in your PC, Doom 3 is going to be bottlenecked by your CPU until you attempt to run at 1600 x 1200 or higher.



The 9800XT tests showed a very different result, with all scores very close together regardless of what speed the CPU was running at. This shows us that video cards such as the 9800XT or lower are the bottleneck, so it doesn't matter if you've got a 1.6GHz or 3.2GHz processor if you're not running one of the newer video cards.

What does it all mean?

Doom 3 goes with the NVIDIA GeForce 6800GT and Ultra video cards in much the same way as bases on Mars and gateways to Hell go together - they're simply a match made in the fiery abyss. The 6800GT isn't far behind the Ultra, making it great value if all you care about is Doom 3 performance. ATI has some catching up to do, but regardless of how much its shoddy OpenGL driver is reworked, we doubt that the current generation of ATI hardware will ever catch up.

Our CPU tests show that on a 9800XT or slower you'll be limited by the graphics card, with CPU speed having little effect on overall performance. However, if you've just splashed out for a new high end card like the 6800GT, the CPU then becomes the limiting factor.

It must be remembered that this is simply one game. There's no doubt that the engine will be used in other games in the distant future, but is it really worth buying a video card based on its performance in one single game? We don't think so.

Running Hell for leather

If you have scabby hardware from the ancient year of 2002, and need to extract the best possible performance out of Doom 3, you might like to try the following tips. Just remember to back up any files you're changing in case things go to awry. We can't verify whether or not these will actually make a difference, but we've looked for confirmation from multiple sources before posting these tweaks.

1) Open your `\Doom 3\base` directory and find the file called `"DoomConfig.cfg"`. Use notepad to open this file. Search for the line:

`seta image_cacheMegs "32"`

Change this to 1/4 of your PC's memory. This has been known to cause a nice performance increase on lower end systems, but can lead to stuttering in certain areas.

2) While you're digging around in the `"DoomConfig.cfg"` file, you might also like to try the following:

`seta image_roundDown "1"`

Change the 1 to 0.

3) If you like to run at the High Quality setting, but don't want to have the automatic anisotropic filtering cranked so high, you can also find the following line in the `"DoomConfig.cfg"` file

`seta image_anisotropy "8"`

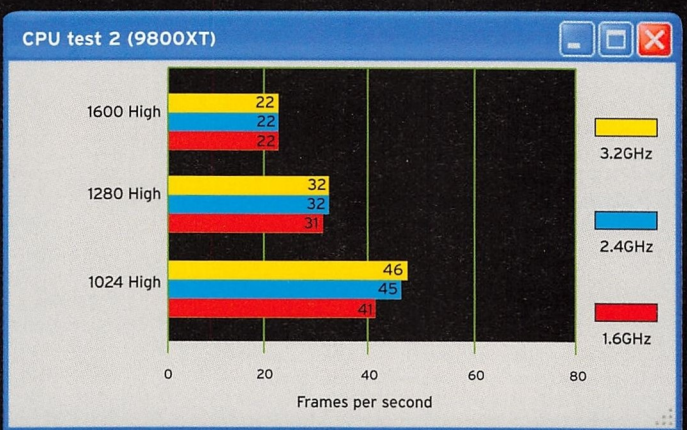
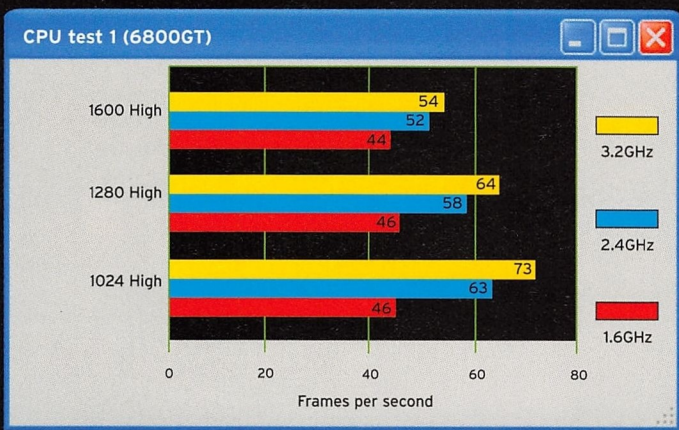
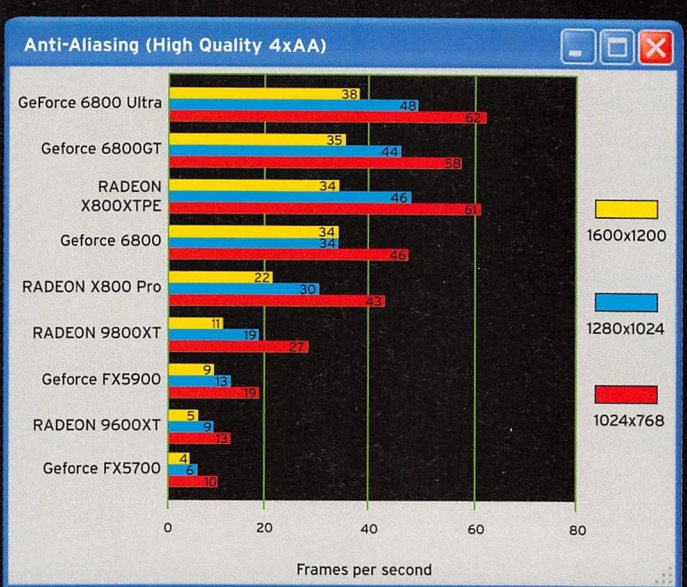
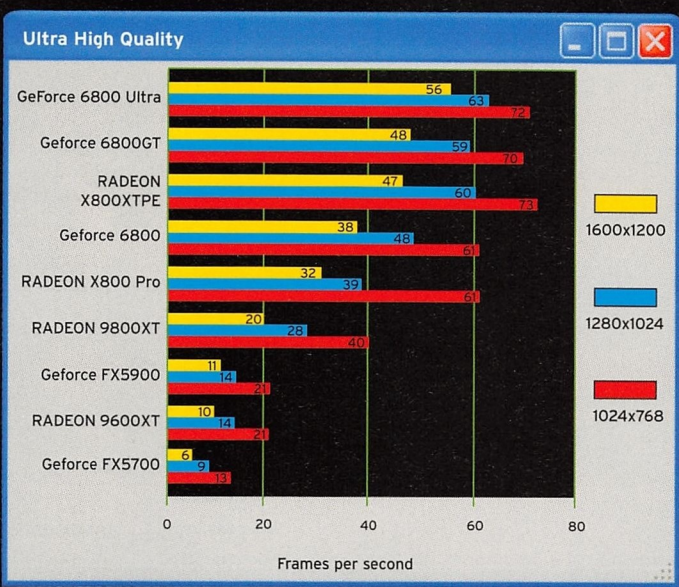
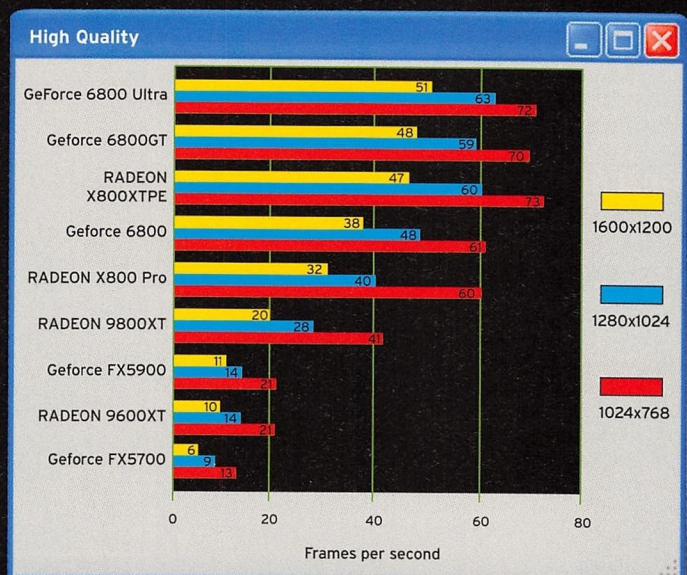
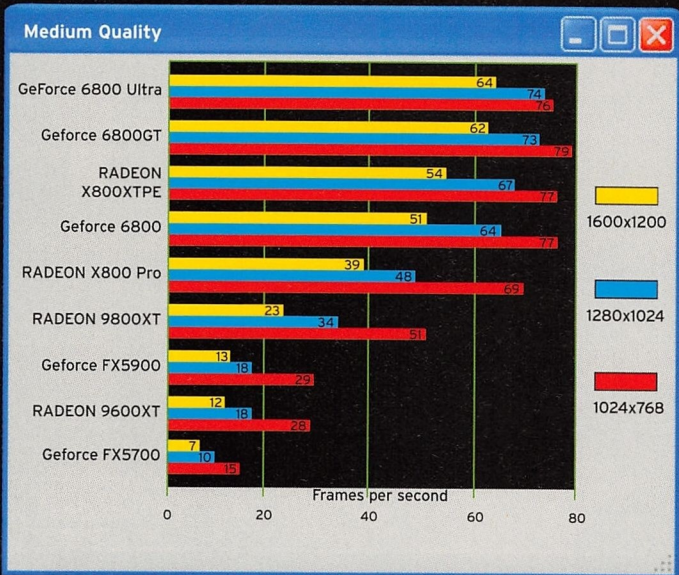
Change the 8 to 4 or 2, depending on how well your card can handle anisotropic filtering.

4) If you're running an ATI card make sure you update the drivers, as ATI has implemented significant performance increases (up to 12%) in the newest release (Catalyst 4.8 at the time this article was written). NVIDIA users should also make sure they're running the latest drivers, but they probably won't notice much of a performance increase.

Doom 3 contains a load of options that can be manually tweaked - head over to <http://ucguides.savagehelp.com/Doom3/FPSVisuals.htm> to see a comprehensive list.



TO HELL AND BACK





PART THREE ALL ABOARD THE PCI EXPRESS

BENNETT RING INTERFACES WITH THE LATEST GRAPHICS CARDS ON THE MARKET

After a year or so of fanfare, hype and copious amounts of marketing hyperbole, PCI Express has finally made it to the PC desktop. As we showed you a couple of issues back, it's turned out to be a bit of a disappointment, but that isn't too surprising. Considering how little difference the increase in AGP speeds made to AGP graphics card's performance, we weren't expecting PCI Express to make much difference either. There's a reason graphics cards have so much onboard memory – it's much quicker to access information stored within the graphics card's memory rather than have to fetch it from your system memory. Hence the introduction of video cards with a whopping 512MB of memory, which we should see before Christmas.

But PCI Express does theoretically have the potential to make a difference in the future; it's just that in today's games, with

today's hardware, we're not really seeing it. Compared to the 2.1GB per second of bandwidth offered by AGP 8X, the 8GB per second (concurrent) offered by the PCI Express x16 connection that today's PCI Express cards offer is a substantial increase. Unfortunately the only users who are currently likely to see a difference in performance are 3D workstation users, and those who edit High Definition video footage.

There is one application of the technology that sounds very interesting though, and that's NVIDIA's new SLI (Scalable Link Interface) technology. This allows gamers to put two SLI compatible PCI Express cards into the one system, almost doubling graphics performance when the planets are aligned correctly. This only works with the PCI Express bus, but there's yet another caveat – the motherboard must have two PCI Express slots compatible with

graphics cards. Unfortunately these aren't yet available to the public, but they're not too far off.

If you're not afraid of spending a little extra cash, and are in the market for an entirely new PC, PCI Express isn't such a bad idea, even though it doesn't offer a performance leap. This is because the AGP interface is going to be phased out in the future, so you'll have more upgrade options if you take the PCI Express route. AGP owners needn't worry though, as we can't see AGP drying up for at least another twelve to twenty four months.

The end is nigh... at last!

This month finally sees the conclusion of our comprehensive graphics chipset PowerTest. We've already covered the AGP cards from both ATI and NVIDIA, so it's time to wrap it all up with a look at both companies PCI Express offerings.

Unfortunately the results of our PCI Express testing aren't directly comparable with the AGP benchmarks, as we had to use an entirely new system for the testing. This is why the PCI Express results are often substantially higher than the AGP tests. However, they will show you how each of the PCI Express cards stacks up against the competition. This time around we used a 3.4GHz LGA775 Pentium 4 processor, running on an Intel 925 based motherboard. 1GB of DDR2 memory running at 533MHz was installed in the board, while we had to use a Soundblaster Audigy 2 due to the onboard sound not working correctly (our Call of Duty benchmark demands working sound to run). We used the same benchmarks as the prior two parts of our graphics roundup, but our drivers changed this time, with the NVIDIA cards using the latest 61.77 detonators.

Leadtek PCX5300

• Price: \$245 • Supplier: BCN Technology www.bcntech.com.au • Website: www.leadtek.com.tw

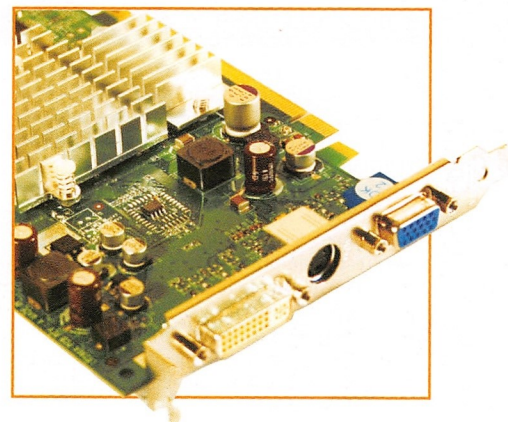
While it's got a fancy new name, this is nothing more than an AGP GeForce FX 5200 dolled up with a shiny new PCI Express x16 interface. The core of this card runs at a lowly 250Mhz, but we couldn't find any reliable figures about the card's memory frequency. Obviously it's not too high, as this proved to be the slowest of all of the PCI Express cards tested. Due to the slower speed of the core, a passive heatsink is all that's necessary to keep this card cool. The total memory amount is 128MB, while DVI-I, TV-out and VGA outputs are provided.

Unfortunately for this card, it couldn't provide playable gaming frame rates in the majority of our game tests. Its Call of Duty result was probably the best, managing to knock out 34 fps at 1024x768, but compared to the competition it definitely struggles. It performed on par with the AGP RADEON 9200SE

and GeForce FX 5200, both of which can be purchased for around \$100. We told you PCI Express cards were more expensive...

However, strangely this card posted a much faster result in Call of Duty than its 5200 predecessor, but this might have something to do with the fact that NVIDIA cards have quirks when it comes to disabling vsync in OpenGL games like Call of Duty.

This card is a prime example of why we recommend sticking with AGP for those on a tight budget, as it's often more expensive than AGP cards of the same performance level. Even when compared to other PCI Express cards such as the X300SE, the PCX5300 still isn't a compelling purchase, costing almost twice as much but performing significantly slower.



Sapphire X300SE

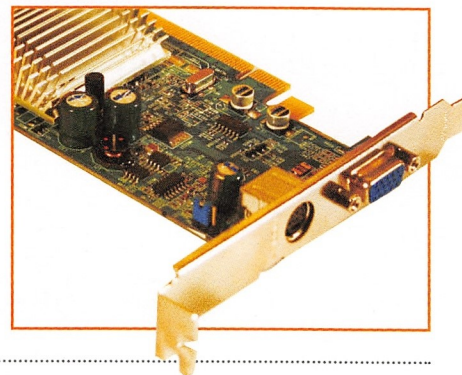
• Price: \$139 • Supplier: Achieva www.achieva.com.au • Website: www.sapphiretech.com

The X300SE chipset is ATI's answer to the budget PCI Express segment, and it's noticeably cheaper than its rivals. In fact it's around half the price of the equivalent NVIDIA chipsets. Like NVIDIA, ATI has simply taken an existing chipset and modified it to run on PCI Express, in this case the RADEON 9200.

Thanks to the relatively slow core speed of only 325MHz, a passive cooler makes this card suitable for Home Theatre PC use. It doesn't have quite as many output options as its NVIDIA rivals, with only VGA and S-Video outputs present. 128MB of DDR-RAM memory clocked in at 200MHz (effectively 400MHz) runs on 64-bit memory bus.

Considering the low price of this card, its performance is quite remarkable. It returned a strong result in UT2K4 at low resolutions, but as per usual with ATI hardware, its performance in the OpenGL game Call of Duty wasn't quite as spectacular. We weren't expecting this card to do too well in the anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering tests, and lo and behold it was the second slowest card of the lot. DirectX 9 results were just as lackluster, with both FarCry and Aquamark 3 returning low framerates.

But for the price, we can't really complain, especially when compared to NVIDIA's low range offerings. The X300SE takes the cake for best value.



AOpen PCX5750

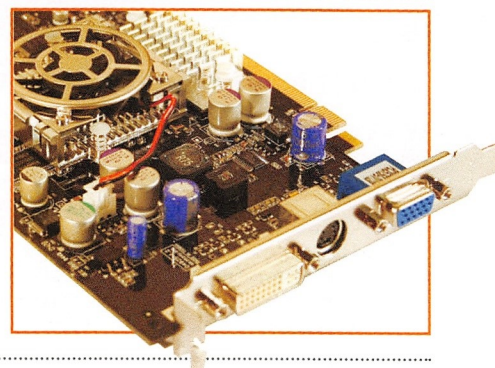
• Price: \$279 • Supplier: BlueChip Infotech www.bluechipit.com.au • Website: www.aopen.com

You might have guessed that this is another of NVIDIA's older AGP cards, prettied up with a PCI Express interface. This time around the card it's based on is the GeForce FX 5700. This card's GPU is clocked at a significantly faster speed than the 5350, at 425MHz. This relatively zippy GPU core has required the installation of a heatsink/fan combination, but it's a tiny unit compared to high end cards. Unfortunately the fact that the GPU is limited to a meager 4 pixel pipelines probably accounts for why it still struggles with some of today's more demanding games (high end video cards now have a whopping 16 pixel pipelines). The 128MB of onboard memory is clocked at 250MHz (effectively 500MHz),

and runs on a 128-bit memory bus.

If you're not too fazed about running cutting edge DirectX 9 games, the 5750 offers decent performance. Our UT2K4 and Call of Duty results were both very playable, and it even posted a decent result in the demanding Aquamark 3 benchmark. Its tidy performance in UT2K4 and Call of Duty even carried over into the anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering benchmark results, which both purred along at the lower resolutions. However, FarCry brought this card to its knees.

Considering that it's only \$40 more than the GeForce PCX5350 it's a faster card, but doesn't offer the excellent bang for buck of the X300SE.



Elsa X300

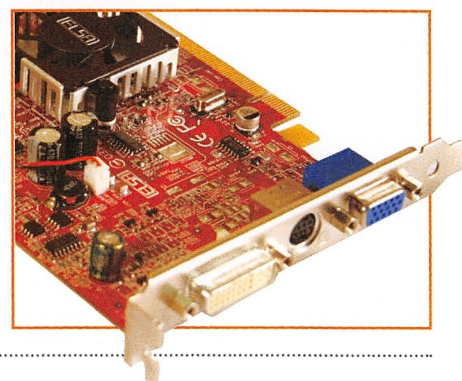
• Price: \$253 • Supplier: Altech www.altech.com.au • Website: www.elsa.com.tw

There's a significant difference in price between the X300SE and this card. It's almost twice the price, which is a massive disparity. So what do you get for your extra cash?

Well, the main difference is the width of the memory bus on the SE - it's a 64-bit sloth. The X300 bumps this up to a 128-bit memory bus, which basically doubles the available memory bandwidth. The GPU and memory speeds are identical to the X300SE, at 325MHz and 200MHz (400MHz effective) respectively.

But the doubling in memory bandwidth has had a significant effect on this card's

performance. At higher resolutions the X300 is over 50% faster than the cheaper card. However, for only a smidgeon more you can purchase a PCX5750, which offers better overall performance.



Abit X600Pro

• Price: \$330 • Supplier: Altech www.altech.com.au • Website: www.abit.com.tw

As far as we can tell, the X600 series of cards are based on the RADEON 9600 chipset. Therefore it's only natural that there would be two variants of these - the slower Pro, followed by the XT, just as we've seen with the 9600.

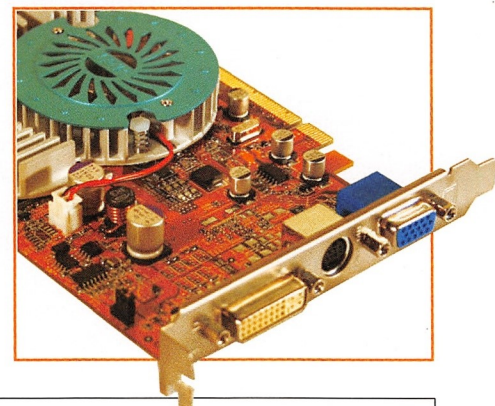
If you compare the price of the X600 Pro and X600XT in this article, you'll see that they both sell for the same amount. This is why our graphics PowerTest is simply a performance guide, allowing you to shop around to find the best price for a certain level of performance. We're sure that if you look around you'll be able to dig up an X600Pro for a more reasonable price, especially if you go for the version with less onboard memory.

The X600 Pro's GPU is clocked in at a respectable

400MHz, while the version we reviewed had a total of 256MB of DDR-RAM. Unfortunately the memory is clocked at a mere 300MHz (600MHz effective) over a 128-bit memory bus, which hampers this card's performance at higher resolutions.

However, this card couldn't really be thrown into the same performance category as those in the lower end bracket. It seemed quite happy to run our older games, UT2K4 and Call of Duty, at 1280 x 1024 resolution. Even when running 4XAA and 8XAF at lower resolutions the performance remained playable.

Unfortunately for this card it's outperformed by both the PCX5900 and X600XT, which can both be had for around the same price.



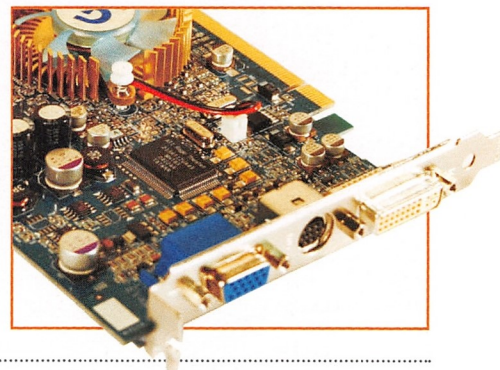
Gigabyte X600XT

• Price: \$329 • Supplier: Synnex www.synnex.com.au • Website: www.gigabyte.com.tw

The X600XT is the slightly faster variant of the X600 chipset from ATI, being marginally faster than the X600Pro. The GPU runs at a blistering 500MHz, an increase of 100MHz over the Pro version. The memory also runs faster, this time churning through your data at a more respectable 370MHz (840MHz effective), 70MHz faster than the Pro card.

In certain benchmarks there is little to no difference between the XT and Pro cards, with FarCry being a prime example. However, during other tests such as UT2K4 and Call of Duty, there was a significant performance boost, with the XT being around 30% faster.

Overall the X600XT is paced a tiny bit slower than the PCX5900. If it was much cheaper than the PCX5900 we'd have to recommend the X600XT. Sadly for ATI it's not.



Albatron PCX5900

• Price: \$345 • Supplier: AMI Computers www.ami-computers.com • Website: www.albatron.com.tw

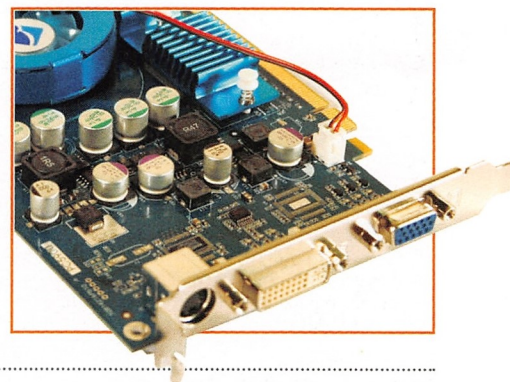
By now you should be able to guess what AGP card this is based on. Give yourself a shiny gold star if you said the GeForce FX 5900. As you can imagine, this gives the card a healthy level of performance. The GPU runs at 350MHz, and 128MB of DDR-RAM is included on the card, clocking in at a hefty 475MHz (950MHz effective). The combination of a quick and more complicated core, as well as fast memory, means this card has quite a sizeable heatsink/fan combination, but it's still a single slot solution.

In last month's NVIDIA roundup, the AGP based GeForce FX 5900 sold for \$489, so we were very surprised to see this card's recommended

retail price of \$345. Obviously NVIDIA chips have had a bit of a price drop over the last month, as the PCI Express variants should theoretically cost more than their AGP equivalents.

When the price of this card is taken into consideration its performance is exceptional. It was only when trying to run at high resolution and with all the eye candy enabled that the performance gap between this card and the high end widened.

For a mere \$20 over the price of the X600XT, the PCX5900 offers a little more performance, thus earning our recommendation for the medium range PCI Express cards.



HIS X800XT PCI-E

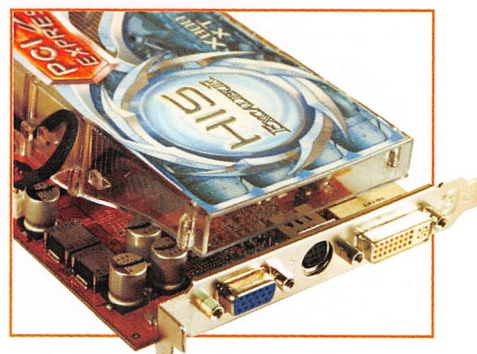
• Price: \$869 • Supplier: AKA tech www.akatech.com.au • Website: www.hightech.com.hk

Now this is a strange one. Obviously it's based on the blazingly fast X800XT chipset from ATI that has taken out our Power Award in the past for being the fastest chipset available. So we expected it once again to take out the fastest card in the roundup, especially considering NVIDIA weren't able to supply us with a PCI Express variant of the GeForce 6800 Ultra (we're not sure one even exists yet). So the closest competition this card had was the PCX 6800GT.

In AGP land the 6800GT generally doesn't come close to offering the performance of the X800XT, except in Doom III, so we thought this card would easily come out on top. But it wasn't to be - in

nearly every test the PCX 6800GT outclassed the more expensive X800XT.

Even when anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering were both enabled, traditionally strong points for ATI, the 6800GT snatched the lead. If we directly compare the AGP X800XT results with the PCI Express variant, we can see that the PCI Express variant has a nice performance lead over the AGP version, which could be a result of both the faster overall platform speed of the PCI Express platform, as well as driver tweaks. As a result we have no choice but to recommend the cheaper PCX 6800GT over the X800XT PCI-E. It looks like ATI now has some ground to recover at the high end.



NVIDIA PCX 6800GT

• Price: \$n/a • Supplier: NVIDIA www.nvidia.com • Website: www.nvidia.com

Wow. That's all we can say about this card. Sure, we knew that the AGP based variant offered excellent performance for the price, but we didn't expect the PCI Express version to surpass ATI's top offering.

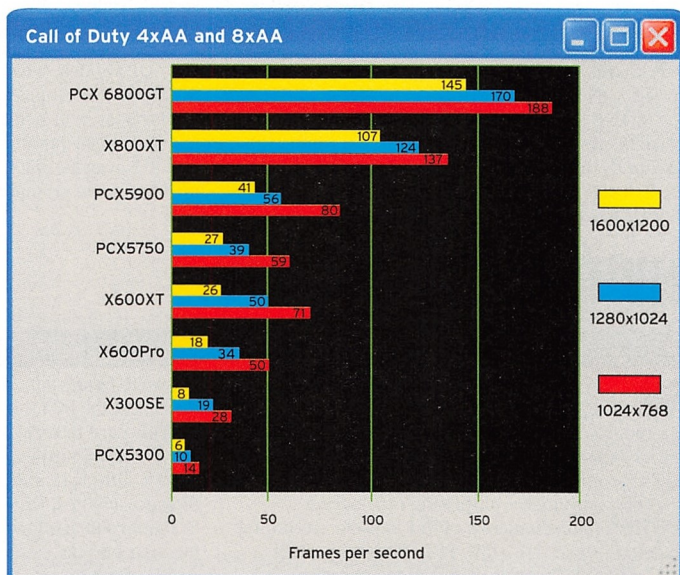
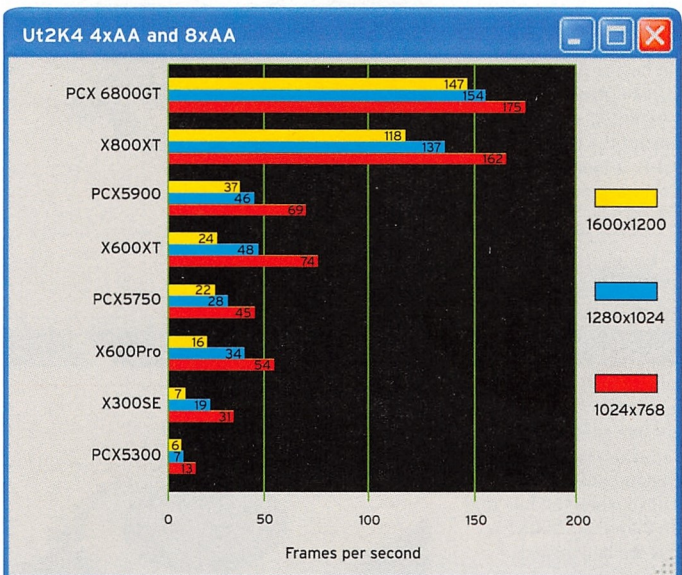
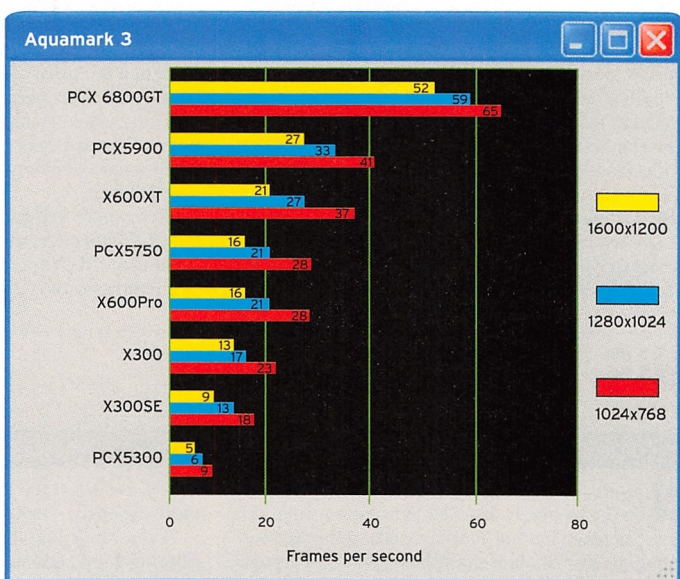
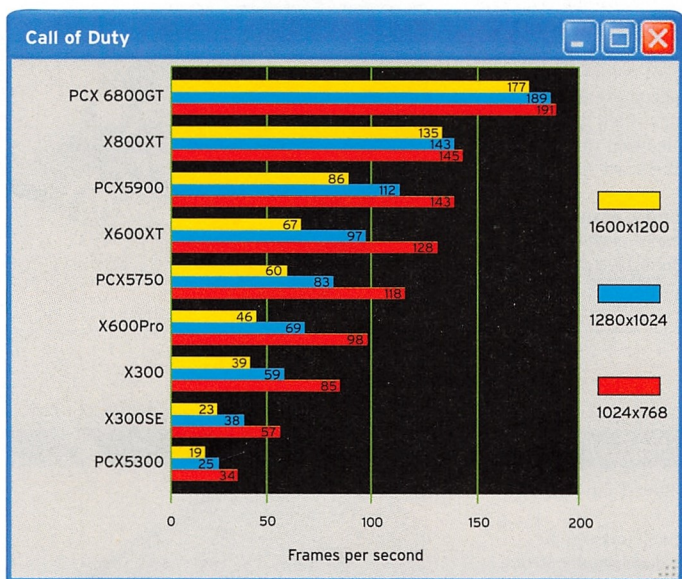
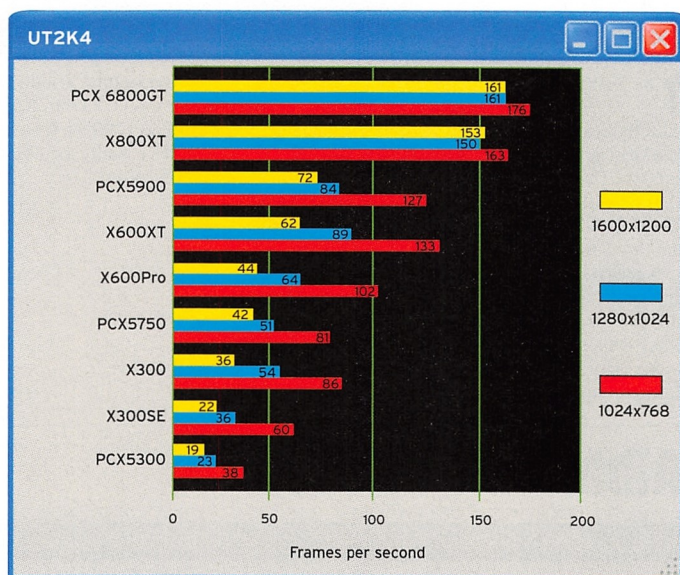
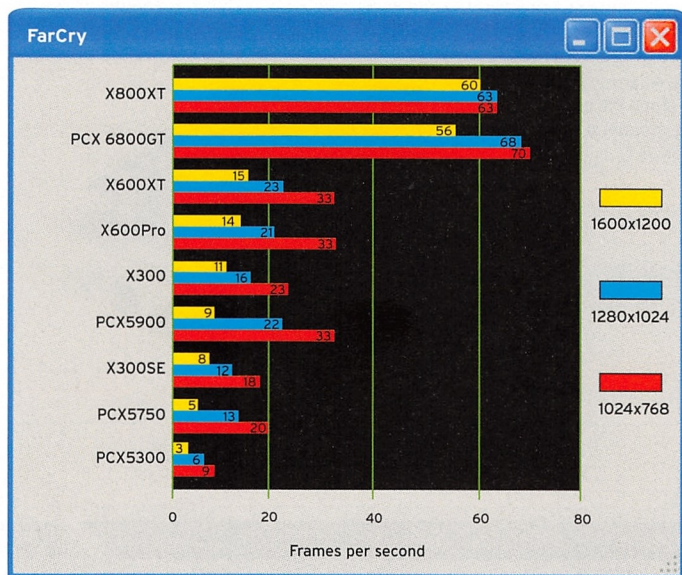
This is even more surprising considering NVIDIA's implementation of PCI Express. According to certain rivals, NVIDIA's PCI Express interface isn't a true PCI Express connection, and even NVIDIA acknowledges that they use a special AGP to PCI Express bridge chip to get its AGP GPUs to function on the PCI Express interface. Many questioned whether or not this would have a performance impact on NVIDIA's PCI Express cards,

but we're happy to report that this obviously isn't the case if the PCX 6800GT is anything to go by.

This card took the number one spot in every game that we threw at it, even when running at 1600 x 1200 with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering enabled. Hard to believe when the fact that it should sell at a lower price than the X800XT is factored into the equation, but the benchmark results don't lie.

Therefore we have to give the thumbs up for the PCX 6800GT for those looking to enter the world of PCI Express graphics at the top end. The fact that you can hook two of these up in SLI mode makes it even more attractive.





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Benq FP783 17" LCD Monitor

• Price: \$ 999 • Distributor: Benq www.benq.com.au • URL: www.benq.com.au/HomeProductList.asp

As LCD prices continue to fall and manufacturers churn out more and cheaper models, it has become increasingly easy to tell if a display is any good: just tick off the features. Low response time, check. High contrast and brightness, check. Works as a USB hub, check. Speakers don't make it horribly ugly, check.

Benq's new FP783 gets full marks for all the standard things we've come to expect. The picture is excellent, the brightness and contrast levels keep everything crisp, and the 12 millisecond response rate makes it ideal for gaming.

So why would you buy one over Samsung's 172X or similar low-response-rate monitor? Well, just look at it! The FP783 is seriously funky. Available in a geek-chic silver/black or a rather tasty off-white/blue combo, this screen looks great atop the most expensive of designer furniture. The stand is stable and solid but also manages to look cool thanks to its amoeba-like design. Truly,

SPECIFICATIONS

- Size: 17" viewable
- Max resolution: 1280x1024
- Contrast: 500:1
- Brightness: 300cd/m²
- Response time: 12ms
- Ports: D-Sub, DVI-D, 3x USB 2.0
- Accessories: Camera, speaker module (both included)

expect to see the FP783 in the next season of Absolutely Fabulous sitting smugly in the background on Eddie's kitchen bench.

Cleverness goes beyond the case, however. Many LCDs ruin their lovely lines with a pig-ugly pair of speakers moulded to the bottom of the bezel. The FP783's speakers are nothing to write home about, except for the fact that they clip on and off the display, so you don't even have to take them out of their plastic wrapping if their bulgy, slightly udder-like look offends you.

The display also comes with a small cheap webcam which clips to the USB port on the top of the unit and gives decent webcam



PCPP Score

Truly funky in design, truly funky in performance

90

quality footage for all your... uh... entrepreneurial activities.

The controls are arranged down the right hand side of the screen, which helps keep the bezel wafer-thin, which is after all the whole point of LCD screens. Apart from the LCD, of course. While all manual controls are provided, the auto-adjust works remarkably well - it had no trouble correctly resizing a desktop piped from a

widescreen notebook, for instance.

Your screen can make all the difference when it comes to enjoying your PC. And the FP783 combines excellent performance with pleasing style and ergonomics to make it seem as if the desktop is floating in front of your eyes rather than trapped inside a gigantic beige bezel.

Anthony Fordham

Sharp XV-Z10E Digital Projector

• Price: \$2,499 • Distributor: Sharp www.sharp.net.au • URL: www.sharp.net.au/catalogue/catalogue.asp

Did you just spend \$6000 on a plasma TV only to discover that you can't even play Animal Crossing on it for sixteen consecutive hours because of the risk of "burn in"? Oh dear. Should have gone for a digital projector.

The XV-Z10E is Sharp's latest attempt to the hit the sweet spot between budget and performance. Not for it are fancy DLP mirrors and doohickies - LCD is just fine. Yet, it's no slouch when it comes to throwing a big, bright and crisp image at 2 metres, 3 metres or even 8 metres. Forget your pathetic static displays and their "inches" - when it comes to projection, we talk in METRES.

First up, Sharp boasts of "advanced optical technology" that allows you to shift the lens in the unit so the projector doesn't have to be positioned right in the middle of the room. In practice, sadly, the lens-shifting joystick

SPECIFICATIONS

- Projection size: 63cm to 813cm
- Max resolution: 854x480
- TV resolution: 520, 720p digital
- Contrast: 700:1
- Inputs: RGB, AV, DVI, S-video
- Fan noise: 34dB
- Extras: Manual zoom, manual focus, lens-shift joystick

you see on the front of the unit only allows you to wobble the lens around through a fairly limited range of planar movement, so you can have the projector placed only ever so slightly to the side. On the other hand, the joystick does allow you to adjust the image a few crucial centimetres left, right, up or down should some galumphing flatmate knock the coffee table on his way to get more beer.

We tested the unit against a wall painted a sort of slightly off-white, yet even in this hardly-ideal environment the colour still



looked great. The OSD lets you change colour temperatures from 5500K all the way up to 10000K so you can compensate for warmer or cool paint, although "warm" is the general feel of the image on any setting.

As for PC gaming, well, the max resolution here is 845x480 so it isn't great. However, when the screen can be as big as the

footprint of a Holden Commodore, it almost seems worth it.

If you've got the cash for a plasma TV, go and buy a high-end DLP projector sure. But if you're looking at a daggy 68cm widescreen CRT for \$2999, save yourself \$600, enjoy a screen ten times bigger, and buy the XV-Z10E.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP Score

Not too expensive, but not a winner for PC gaming, this unit should still suit all your DVD and console needs

79

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Leadtek WinFast A400 GT TDH (GeForce 6800GT) and WinFast A400 TDH (GeForce 6800)

• Price: see review • Distributor: BCN Tech www.bcntech.com.au • URL: www.leadtek.com.tw



The chunky 6800GT

Now is a tough time to be shopping for a video card. Thanks to two awesome chipsets from both NVIDIA and ATI, it's hard to pick a clear winner. Not to mention the fact that you've got to decide whether or not to go for a PCI Express or AGP video card. At the very top end the X800XT still gets our pick for being a tad bit faster than the 6800 Ultra, but finding either is easier said than done. If you're looking for a slightly more affordable solution than these two cards, yet still want to stay close to the high end, the new NVIDIA 6800GT might be just the card you're looking for. We took a look at Leadtek's version of this chipset, as well as the plain Jane 6800.

Both of these cards are based around NVIDIA's new NV40 GPU. This powerful chip has full DX9 support, as well as support for the new Shader Model 3.0 (a feature lacking in ATI's high end chips). In the 6800GT this chip is clocked in at 350MHz (the 6800 Ultra runs at 400MHz), and has the full 16 pixel pipelines enabled. The 6800 runs slightly slower, at 325MHz, but has had four of these pixel pipelines disabled, leaving it with a total of 12. This cut in the number of pixel pipelines allows NVIDIA to use NV40 chips that aren't quite perfect when they come off the production line. The 6800 is also lacking one of the six vertex shaders of the other cards, giving it a total of five.

The memory speeds of the two cards are different as well. The GT uses 500MHz GDDR-3 memory (1GHz effective), while the 6800 uses significantly slower 350MHz DDR memory (700MHz effective). The 6800 Ultra uses the same memory type as the GT, but it's clocked slightly faster, at 550MHz (1.1GHz effective). The GT has twice as much onboard memory as the 6800, at 256MB compared to the 6800's 128MB. Both cards have a single 4-pin molex power input. The GT has a considerably larger

double slot heatsink, which covers the PCI slot next to the AGP slot.

To test the performance of these cards we pitted them against ATI's closest rival, the X800 Pro. We've recently upgraded our test benches with the X800 Pro cards, as you can see on our PowerTools page. The cards were installed into a system with a 3.4GHz Pentium 4, as well as 1GB of DDR400, to lessen CPU and memory bottlenecks.

We ran our standard range of benchmarks, and the 6800GT managed to sustain the best performance in all of the tests we ran without anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering. In many of these tests the increase over the



The slender 6800

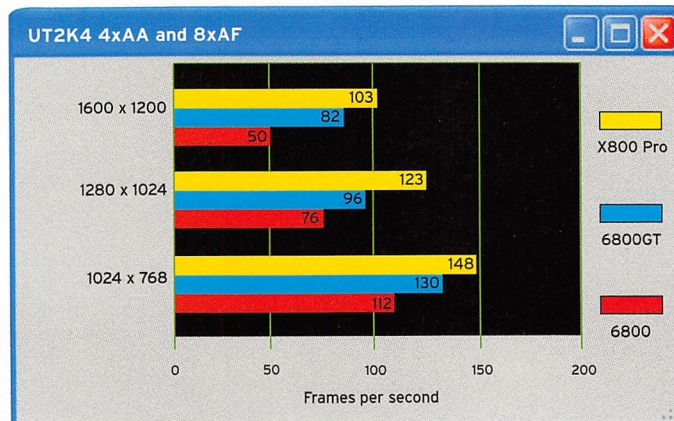
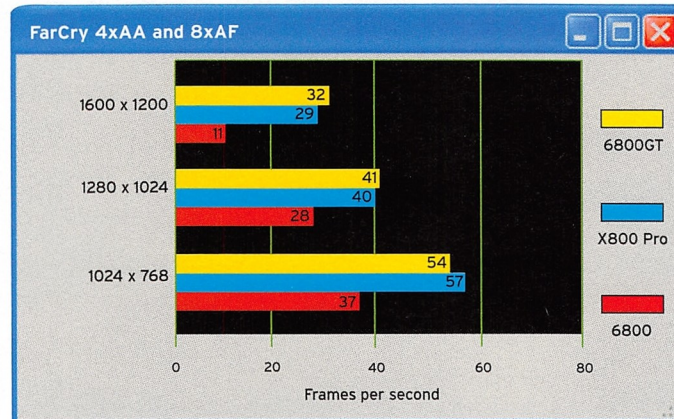
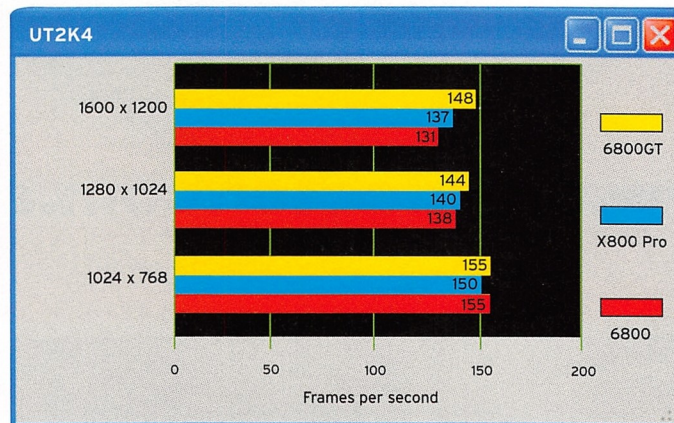
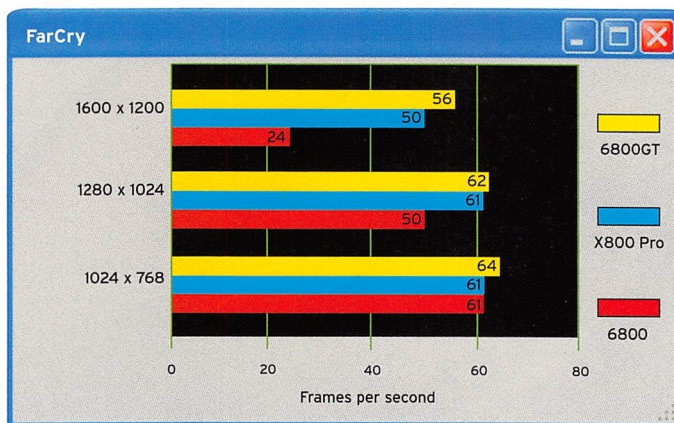
X800 Pro was around 10%. The 6800 didn't fare as well, especially at the highest resolution of 1600 x 1200.

It was a slightly different story in the two anti-aliasing/anisotropic filtering tests. The X800 Pro managed to score top spot in UT2K4, by around 20% at higher resolutions, while the 6800GT retained the lead in FarCry, by a few percent. This suggests that either of these cards will run well with these settings enabled, but the X800 Pro has a more prominent lead in games where it excels.

Depending on where you look, the X800 Pro can be purchased for somewhere between \$770 and \$895 (www.razorprices.com.au is your friend). On the other hand, the Leadtek 6800GT retails for anywhere between \$820 and \$860, while the 6800 is significantly cheaper, with prices ranging from \$585 to \$615. Just like the high end, it's tough to pick a clear winner between the X800 Pro and the 6800GT. One thing is clear though - either of these cards should be able to run today's games without breaking a sweat.

SUMMARY

The 6800GT offers excellent performance, at a more affordable price than the 6800 Ultra.



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• Price: \$ 242 • Distributor: Benq www.altec.com.au • URL: www.antec.com

For the power gamer, only the best throbbing PSU will do to keep the power addiction at bay. But more aesthetic factors like whisper quietness and internal ergonomics are important too. Enter the Antec NeoPower PSU. Bow down and let the worship commence.

This unit is a 480W monster, with dual +12V rails to pump the juice to where it's needed the most. It's also ATX 12v v2.0 compliant, which means it reduces power wastage by about 25% compared with non-compliant systems.

The spec list on this PSU is impressive, but the biggest new feature is the cable management. Unlike all other PSUs, which come with all available cables attached and ready to go, the NeoPower only has the most basic ones pre-attached - 24-pin motherboard, +12V and 3-pin fan. All the other cables come separately. The unit has four 6-pin output sockets on the side to

SPECIFICATIONS

- 480W ATX 12v 2.0 supply
- Advanced cable management
- Power input 100V - 240V AC
- Dual +12V rails
- SATA/PCI Express connectors
- Variable fan speed
- External fan control

clutter inside your case and promoting better airflow throughout.

The NeoPower comes prepped to support all the latest hardware. It has SATA power connectors, which means you don't have to bother with the annoying SATA extenders. It also comes with power connectors for PCI-Express graphics cards.

For those of you with delicate eardrums, noise reduction has been targeted through a temperature-response system which varies the fan speed depending on system load. Crank up the games and the fan revs up, do your homework on Word and it settles down to a quiet



hum. It also has power connectors for up to three external fans, which are then part of the fan management system, so the PSU can handle noise control across the entire machine. Couple all that up with a 120mm fan on the unit itself, and you've got some serious humming sweetness.

It's also a great unit for the

overclocker. All the voltage ranges have trip points, giving you enough headroom to make alterations to your core system, while providing a safety blanket should things turn nasty, and protecting your peripherals from a burning, smoking fate.

James Bannan

PCPP Score

This is a PSU for the serious power user. It's pricey, but is worth every dollar.

90

Creative Zen Touch

• Price: \$499 (with wired remote control) • Distributor: www.au.creative.com • URL: www.creative.com

Creative have been synonymous with quality (and funky) computer audio products for a long time, and the Zen Touch is the latest in the list. In many ways, it's reminiscent of Apple's iPod - similar design, similar look, similar capacity - but with some added bonuses.

The hardware specs are impressive. The Zen sports a 20GB hard drive (good enough for about 5000 128kbps MP3s), a lithium ion battery, USB 2.0 transfer port, a Touch Pad for scrolling navigation and a wired remote control unit. The remote control gives you full control over the unit, and also adds FM radio and voice recording functionality. The unit itself is nice and compact, although a little heavy. Navigating the unit is pretty straightforward, as there aren't that many options to choose. The Touch Pad is VERY funky, with no raised components, and slow-scrolling and fast-scrolling modes.

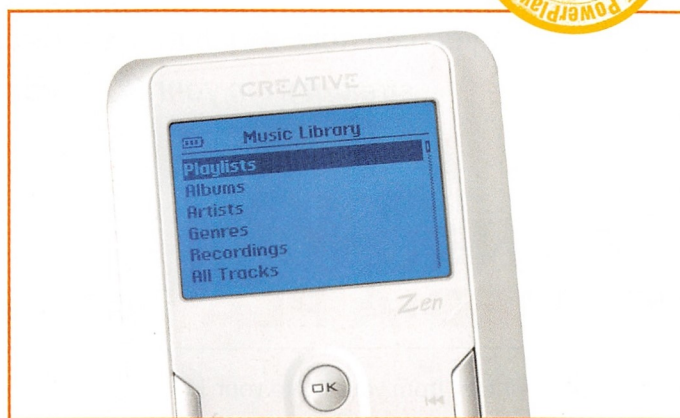
SPECIFICATIONS

- 24-hour battery life on continuous playback
- 20GB hard drive
- Holds music files & data
- USB 2.0 transfer
- 97dB Signal-to-Noise ratio
- 4 band equaliser

Battery life is awesome - 24 hours continuous playback with 128kbps MP3 or equivalent. And that's double the battery life of the iPod.

Both the LCD on the unit and on the remote display the MP3/WMA file tag information, but this doesn't slow down the seek time when flipping between tracks. The tag information is pretty important with the Zen Touch, as you can't use a folder structure to organise your music files. They will automatically be sorted by playlists, album name, artist name or music genre, and all this info is read from the individual files.

The software bundle is very



comprehensive. The basic driver set installs Nomad Explorer, allowing you to interact with the unit through Windows Explorer. There is also a music organiser which lets you sort music files, create playlists, rip music CDs and burn them too. There's an audio converter for WAV/MP3/WMA conversion, as well as a media player. If you can't be stuffed with yet ANOTHER batch of music applications, the Zen Touch is 100% compatible with Microsoft Media Player, so just plug it in and away you go. You won't get the data

capabilities without Nomad Explorer, however.

Data transfer is slick - we pushed across a couple of gig of MP3s in five minutes. Unlike the iPod it doesn't have a firewire port, but USB 2.0 more than makes up for that. It's great news for data transfer too. The unit can act as a portable 20GB hard drive, which is pretty damn convenient, and it's lighter than a 2.5" portable drive too. The only drawback is that you can't map a drive directly to the device.

James Bannan

PCPP Score

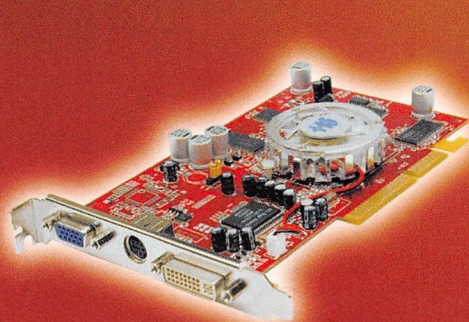
This groovy unit has everything, including the slick-lifestyle cool factor. A very worthy rival to the iPod.

90

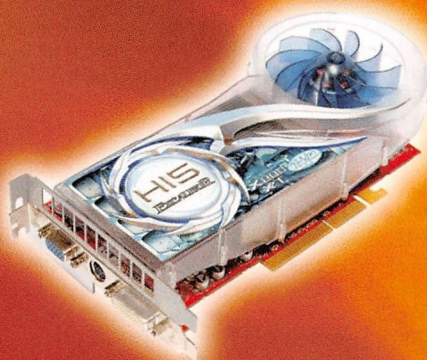
HIS

VOTED THE BEST PERFORMING GRAPHIC CARDS
BY CRITICS WORLDWIDE

THERE'S NO COMPARISON



**HIS 9550 iFAN
VIVO EDITION**



**HIS X800XT &
X800PRO ICEQ II**



**HIS 9600XT
TURBO iCOOLER**

Fast

Runs Faster than 9600SE

iTURBO, HIS's Intelligent cooling technology automatically adjust IceQ II fan speed base on X800's loading and temperature to achieve best performance.

TURBO speed at 650 mhz memory clock

Quiet

Less than 20dB

Less than 20dB

Less than 24dB

Cool

HIS iFan provides -11c lower than heat sink version

IceQ II provides -11c lower than original cooling fan

iCooler with ICE-Blue Led light

HIS is an Internationally acclaimed graphic cards company. Time and time again, HIS were compared and tested by hundreds of worldly renowned critics. The results are in, HIS have proven to offer far superior, cooler, quieter, and faster graphic cards than any other leading rivals. We are the proud winner of these fabulous award and hundreds more. HIS Excalibur product are certified by ATI to guarantee high standard of Quality, Reliability and Visual Performance. For more information about the company and products, please visit <http://www.HISdigital.com>.

HIS has won over 100 awards with ATI graphic solution from major media worldwide.



**BEST OF TOM'S
HARDWARE 2003
HIS 9800PRO ICEQ**



**IXBT ORIGINAL
DESIGN 2004
HIS 9800PRO ICEQ**



**TWEAKTOWN'S
BEST FEATURE AWARD
HIS 9600XT TURBO
iCooler**



**OVERCLOCKER CAFE
EDITOR CHOICE AWARD
HIS 9600XT TURBO
iCooler**



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Fax: 61 2 9896 5646
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Clayton, VIC 3168
Ph: 61 3 9562 0022
Fax: 61 3 9562 2696
ACN: 080 800 068

QLD
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Newsstead, QLD 4006
Ph: 61 7 3852 1899
Fax: 61 7 3852 1755
ACN: 080 800 120

NZ
Unit B, 515A Mt Wellington Hwy, Mt Wellington, Auckland, NZ
Tel: +64-9-573 2277 Fax: +64-9-573 0148

SA
Unit 4, 2-4 Marker Ave,
Marleston, SA 5033
Ph: 61 8 8371 3388
Fax: 61 8 8371 3833
ACN: 080 800 166

WA
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Osborne Park, WA 6017
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AMD Sempron 2800+

• Price: N/A • Distributor: N/A • URL: www.amd.com

Sempron may sound like Semper Fi, but is not to be confused with the US Marines' signature phrase. Rather, it is the name given to the new AMD budget CPU offerings. For those who've read their 'Latin for Dummies' tomes back to front, you'll undoubtedly know that 'semper' translates to something like 'always', 'everyday', or perhaps 'practical' depending on the usage. As for 'pron', I have no idea what that is... (yeah right - Ed) but it raises the question, what are AMD thinking, trying to introduce daily pron? Well the short answer is that the Sempron is intended to be the new Duron, and thus, the new Celeron killer.

Things on the Duron front have been quiet for while now, so there's plenty of scope for Sempron to bring some goodies to the party, starting with the high speeds that the Thoroughbred core provides. Yes, you read correctly, they've ignored the more popular Barton core, and gone with what is essentially a smaller and cooler core for this everyday chip. The diminutive size is maintained with a little assistance from the smaller than currently favoured L2 cache, in typical budget fashion.

Semprons start from a lowly 2200+ model and extend right up to 3100+. They'll predominantly be introduced via the veteran Socket A implementation which may seem a tad strange, however the higher end Semprons, like the 3100+ and above, will appear in the Socket 754 format. The benefit of this two

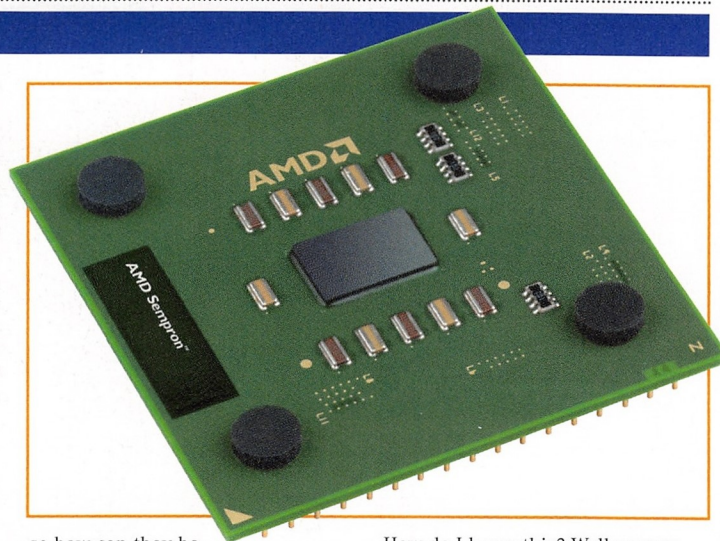
pronged approach might seem obvious, with the key being flexibility. OEM packagers will rake in the real benefits, and they're the target of this product line.

Like Durons and Celerons, the Sempron has a minimised L2 cache, though at 256KB it's twice as generous as the Duron's. And due to AMD's 'Exclusive' cache architecture, it should prove more fruitful than Intel's 'inclusive' caching method. Inclusive cache mirrors the L1 cache contents inside the L2 cache, thereby taking up valuable space. AMD's exclusive method keeps them separate, effectively increasing the total amount of useable cache. The radical and well received integrated memory controller that's popped up in newer Athlon 64 chips isn't incorporated into the Socket A Sempron, but the Socket 754 variant will benefit from this new technology.

We received an AMD Sempron 2800+. This toddler runs at 2000MHz, using a 166MHz bus (effectively 333 MHz due to the double pumped nature of its data transmission). In the past, the 2000 MHz AMD chips have performed around the 2400/2500XP mark, and this one sits just north of there,

SPECIFICATIONS

- Frequency: 2000MHz
- L1 Cache: 64KB Data, 64KB Instruction
- L2 Cache: 256KB
- Package: 0.13 Micron, Thoroughbred Core via Socket A



so how can they be calling it a 2800? Well perhaps AMD have shifted their goalposts slightly by relying slightly more on synthetic and application based benchmarks. Or perhaps they're comparing results against Celeron chips. In any case, it's slightly misleading from a gamer's perspective.

In terms of realistic gaming benchmarks, the 2800+ CPU sits amongst the expectations of a Pentium 2.4, an AMD XP2600, or perhaps slightly above a Celeron 2800. Now that's not terrible for a budget chip, but it raises two major points. Firstly, the focus of this chip is not gaming. Secondly, gamers need to take a couple of hundred Mhz off if they're thinking of buying one.

I'll now impress you with my incredible E.S.P talents, by telling you something about yourself. You only spend 10% of your PC time playing games, you are finding it hard to put McDonalds on the table, and you have resorted to either piracy or games journalism as your primary games collecting method.

How do I know this? Well anyone else probably stopped reading last paragraph, but there are a few more items of interest. Firstly, overclockability is 'reasonable'. These chips are all multiplier locked, but it still managed a stable 2219MHz. That's an 11% increase which, thanks to my lower expectations these days, is an acceptable result. In terms of heat output, at idle we're talking a toasty 52 degrees (stock cooler); not out of the ordinary for a chip at this frequency. Overclocking resulted in a very slight increase up to 54.

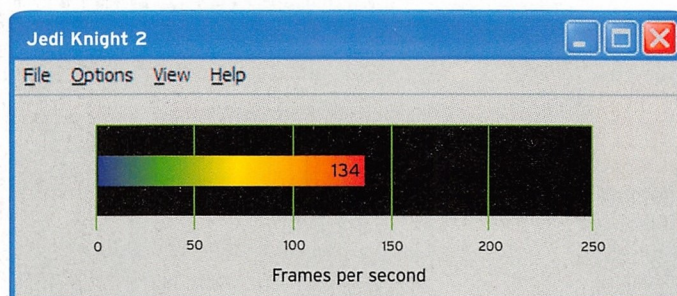
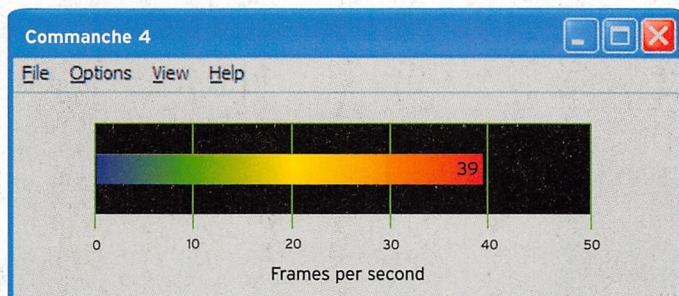
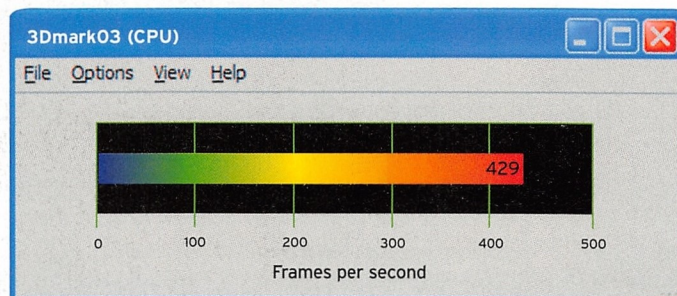
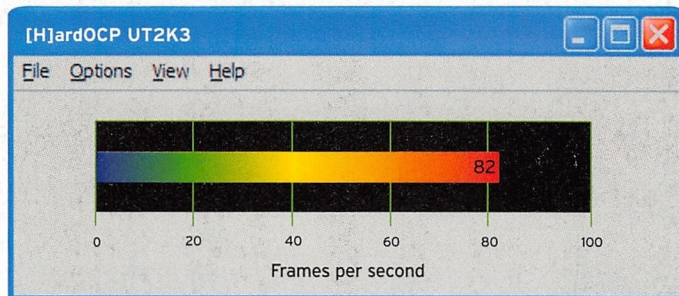
With a street price of around \$190, compared to \$210 for an equivalent Celeron, this particular chip looks like a decent buy. However when you can pick up an Athlon XP2600+ for 25% less, with similar performance, it seems a bit like a Clayton's budget chip. Nevertheless, watch for the inevitable slew of package deals and laptops with 'Sempron Inside' stickers adorning them soon, and don't be surprised if your next work PC suffers one either.

Jason Brown

PCPP Score

Apply a -200MHz modifier to your wallet and you'll be satisfied

82





Combo Cool DIY Design Your Own CPU Cooler

At ThermalTake, we are frequently asked whether this fan can be connected to that heatsink. Now we have made it easier for you. Simply select a heatsink and a fan from the list below to design your own Combo Cool DIY CPU Cooler

	GOLF325	HAMMER525	PIPE101	TOWER102	TOWER112
UFO#1		UFO#1 + Hammer525	UFO#1 + PIPE101		UFO#1 + TOWER112
UFO#2	UFO#2 + GOLF325		UFO#2 + PIPE101	UFO#2 + TOWER102	
UFO#3		UFO#3 + Hammer525		UFO#3 + TOWER102	UFO#3 + TOWER112
XBPRO#1	XBPRO#1 + GOLF325			XBPRO#1 + TOWER102	XBPRO#1 + TOWER112
XBPRO#2			XBPRO#2 + PIPE101	XBPRO#2 + TOWER102	
XBPRO#3	XBPRO#3 + GOLF325		XBPRO#3 + PIPE101	XBPRO#3 + TOWER102	XBPRO#3 + TOWER112
Silent Cat 8CM		Silent Cat 8CM + Hammer525		Silent Cat 8CM + TOWER102	Silent Cat 8CM + TOWER112
Silent Cat 9CM	Silent Cat 9CM + GOLF325		Silent Cat 9CM + PIPE101		Silent Cat 9CM + TOWER112
Street Fighter	Street Fighter + GOLF325		Street Fighter + PIPE101	Street Fighter + TOWER102	Street Fighter + TOWER112

* Technical specifications available from www.thermaltake.com.au
* Fans can also be used as a case fan for total system cooling



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Plantronics Audio 45 USB Stereo PC headset

• Price: \$99 • Distributor: Polaris Communications www.polaris.com.au • URL: www.plantronics.com.au

The majority of users won't even bat an eyelid at this headset. Being able to play sound via the USB sound decoder is kind of cool (meaning that you don't need a sound card in your PC), but it doesn't offer the sound quality or effects of one of Creative's creations. Not even close, to be brutally honest. The speakers in the headphone are underwhelming beasts that don't offer the performance found in other, comparably priced headphones. The microphone is possibly the best feature, offering exceptional voice quality when paired up with a decent voice comms program. Yet, for a certain type of user, this headset might just be a must have item.

This user has a 4.1, 5.1 or even 7.1 speaker setup installed on their PC. Don't we all? After all, the audio cues offered by surround sound can be a valuable aid in not getting your ass kicked, as well as boosting immersion

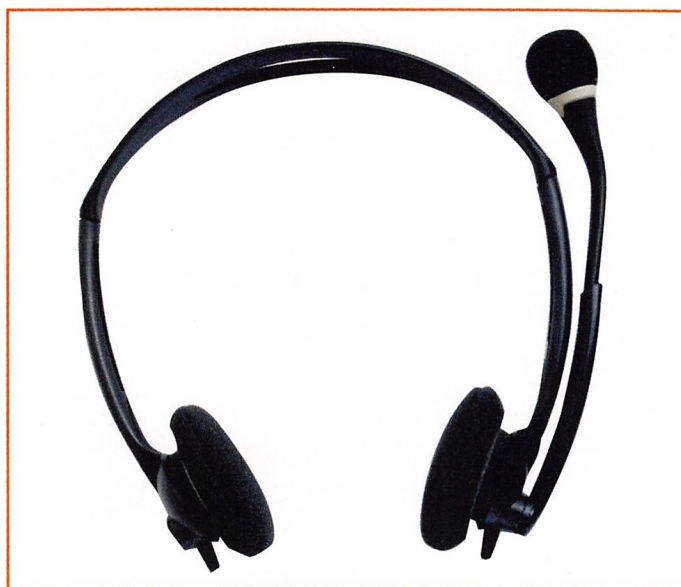
SPECIFICATIONS

- 32-bit audio DSP
- USB
- Noise-cancelling microphone
- Stereo headphones

immensely. This user also uses voice comms such as Ventrilo. Which, by the way, is one of the finest free voice apps available - head over to www.ventrilo.com to scoop up the free download.

If you're one of these users, it's often a pain in the butt to have Ventrilo piped through your speakers. In the middle of a rowdy gunfight it's often quite difficult to hear what your team mates are saying. Enter this headset.

Using Ventrilo, you're able to select this headset as the playback device, while your games continue to use your PC's sound card for their effects. So you can have the booms and bangs of Battlefield piped through your 5.1 speakers, yet only have the voices of your team mates coming through the



headset. Not only does it make it easier to hear your team mates during a particularly fierce clash, it's also much cooler, because it's more realistic.

\$99 is a large chunk of cash to pay for the convenience of this setup, but for hardcore shooter fans it's probably worth it. However, if

you're not one of these users, it's hard to recommend the headset, unless you've got no sound devices in your PC. Even then we'd suggest you install a cheap PCI soundcard for \$70 or so instead, as the sound quality will be better.

Bennett Ring

PCPP Score

Useless for most, but a select few will love it.

75

Optorite DD1203

• Price: \$159 • Distributor: BlueChip IT (www.bluechipit.com.au) • URL: [Xclef www.optorite.com](http://www.optorite.com)

Well, it's finally happened. DVD burning speeds have hit double figures. Let joy and jubilation reign. The DD1203 from Optorite is one of the few writers on the market to boast 12x DVD+R burning. That's good enough to do an entire DVD in just over six minutes. Shame it doesn't do DVD-R at the same speed, but we can't have everything, can we?

It comes resplendent with a nice bundle of goodies, namely 40x CD burning, 24x CDRW and high density CD burning, and 4x DVD+/-RW. It's also reads CDs at 40x, single-layer DVDs at 12x and dual-layers at 8x. It doesn't support DVD-RAM.

It has loads of nice fail-safe features for faultless burning - flexible strategy/flexible speed protection, BurnProof, Safe-BP, Shock-BP and a 2MB internal buffer. Safe-BP and Shock-BP monitor the physical aspects of the burn - how the drive is handling, whether there are any

SPECIFICATIONS

- 12x DVD+R burn
- 8x DVD-R burn
- 4x DVD+/-RW burn
- 40x CD-R burn
- 24x CD-RW burn
- 24x HD burn
- 12x DVD+/-R & +/-RW read
- 40x CD-R/CD-RW/CD-ROM read
- BurnProof, HD Burn

external impacts - and automatically drops the burning speed to the lowest possible to guarantee the burn integrity. All of these protections apply whether it's mounted vertically or horizontally, so you'd basically have to be trying to burn a beer mat to get it wrong with this baby.

High density burning is an Optorite exclusive technology, developed by Sanyo. It allows you to write up to 1.4GB on a standard 700MB blank CD. Nice, huh? The only drama, of course, is that only Optorite drives can read the burned result. Other drives will slowly be



able to, but not without a firmware update first.

CD and DVD read/seek times were very good, with the drive reaching its 40x CD read speed, and its 8x dual-layer DVD-ROM speed. It couldn't quite manage the 12x single-layer DVD-ROM read, but it came close. Write speeds were also excellent across all media types, with the advertised speeds reached.

The software bundle is basic

but very good. Nero Burning Rom and PowerDVD 5 get the job done every time.

So do we recommend it? Well, considering you can now get dual layer DVD burners for around the same price, it's a little disappointing. However, you get a fast, high-speed single layer burner with all the trimmings, which does all that Optorite says it will do.

Bennett Ring

PCPP Score

Pricey for a single layer drive, but it's reliable and will meet the vast majority of your burning needs

68

MicroGram

Best range! Better price! Top quality!

HOT PRICE

8dBi Wireless LAN Antenna

Perfect for increasing the signal from an access point. Provides a suitable antenna for an access point in Infrastructure mode or Point to Multi Point mode. It is an 8dB, vertically polarised designed to operate in the 2.4GHz range. It has a 50 ohm passive feed and has a Type N female connector.
Cat 11430-16 \$139

"It's transfer speeds were almost uniformly excellent and remarkably consistent"

PC User magazine
August 2004

Awarded
"Top Buy" in the August
edition of PC User

HOT PRICE

SATA Controller

Add SATA drives to your PC.
Cat 2872-16 \$99

Voice Activated Remote

Issue voice commands to any device that uses an infrared remote control
Cat 9180-16 \$239

Video Chat Kit

Comes with USB web-cam/mic and a headset.
Cat 3541-16 \$149

HOT PRICE

USB FM Radio

Listen to the radio on your laptop/pc.
Cat 3539-16 \$59



Extend USB 50m

Use any USB device up to 50m from a PC over inexpensive UTP cable (not included)
Cat 11666-16 \$105

HOT PRICE

USB Net Phone

Make free PC to PC calls, and calls to landline phones world-wide at ridiculously low rates over your internet connection.
Cat 10129-16 \$89



Front Access Bay

This 5 1/4" bay has USB 2.0, FireWire, Power Out, Audio In/Out and a 6 in 1 memory card reader.
Cat 6765-16 \$129



Two Port KVM with Sound

Allows one keyboard, monitor, and mouse to control two PCs. Includes 1.2m cables.
Cat 11669-16 \$139



SATA HD Rack

This removable HD kit includes the tray and frame and is aluminium.
Cat 6787-16 \$139



USB 2.0 TV Box

Watch TV on your laptop or PC
Cat 3527-16 \$189



12.1" LCD Monitor

This tiny LCD screen is great for space critical situations.
Cat 4658-16 \$969



IDE RAID Controller

Attach up to four IDE drives in RAID
Cat 2886-16 \$99

Front Access Video Editing

This great capture card comes with a front access bay for easy access. Captures analogue and digital signals.
Cat 23027-16 \$399



FireWire 800 Card

This PCI card supports both FireWire A and B with speeds up to 800Mbps
Cat 2997-16 \$129



Wireless PC Lock

Automatically locks a PC when the user is more than 2m away from it.
Cat 8545-16 \$79



USB Serial Port

No serial port on your new laptop? This mini USB to serial adapter is the answer!
Cat 2920-16 \$54



External HD Case

This external case takes a 3.5" HD and connects via USB 2.0
Cat 6711-16 \$129



Thermaltake Silent Boost

Suits Athlon XP up to 3400. Very quiet (21dBA)
Cat X1402-16 \$79

NEW!

Optical AV Switch

Switch between three inputs and one output. Has S-VHS, RCA, and Optical Audio.
Cat 23023-16 \$149



802.11G PCI Card

Suits both 32 and 64 bit PCI slots. A higher gain antenna can be attached.
Cat 11443-16 \$129



Optical to RCA Coaxial

Converts two of the most common digital interfaces Toslink & RCA coaxial (S/PDIF).
Cat 23006-16 \$49

Wireless LAN Equipment! We've got the lot - antennas, cards, pigtails, converters, cables!



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See all these products & more on our website...www.mgram.com.au

SHORE AD/MGRAM104PCP

Bennett Ring PowerTools

While it would make our jobs a heck of a lot easier if we could review hardware based on the shininess of the packaging it arrives in, we're pretty sure our beloved readers are a little more interested in how the hardware actually performs. Which is why we have the PC PowerPlay PowerTools - batteries not included.

If you're anything like us, you probably don't give a rat's arse if Word will open three seconds faster on the new Pentium 64,

or if you can compress a zip file more speedily using DDR6-8000 memory. Nope, this is PowerPlay, so it's all about how well your games will perform.

Our PowerTools are broken into two categories, videocard tests and CPU/motherboard/memory tests, and you'll notice that most of these are based on real world game engines. We spoke to Intel, AMD, NVIDIA and ATI about which games to use to benchmark our hardware, and

after tossing out their biased recommendations settled on the following applications for the majority of our tests.

Actually, we used the benchmarks that competing companies both agreed upon, to help make sure our tests can't be accused of favouring one flavour of hardware over another.

Of course, every now and then a unique piece of hardware will arrive that can't be tested properly using these

applications, and in these circumstances we'll use the most appropriate benchmarking software.

We also use test benches (a fancy way of saying a PC outside of a case, waiting to electrocute unsuspecting hardware noobs), standardised hardware platforms that ensure our benchmark results can be compared to each other month after month. Check out the box below to see what components we use in our test benches.

CPU Tests

3D Mark03 CPU test

Nobody can deny that this CPU test is a nice way to give processors a thorough workout. And hey, it's easy to use and free - 'nuff said.

Jedi Knight 2

We couldn't ignore a benchmark that includes lightsabres. We run this test at low resolution (640x480), with texture details lowered, and geometry details maxed out.

[H]ardOCP Unreal Tournament 2003 test 2.1

We run the CPU test of this benchmark at low resolution, and it's one of the finest indicators of CPU performance available.

Comanche 4

It sucked as a game, but as a CPU/motherboard/memory benchmark this is a beauty. We run at 640x480 resolution to make sure it's the CPU that's carrying the load.

Videocard tests

Aquamark3

Aquanox isn't the most popular game, but the engine behind it

makes for a great benchmarking application. We crank all the settings to the highest.

Call of Duty

OpenGL is on the verge of extinction, but there's one very important game that still uses it. Call of Duty is the premiere WWII themed shooter, and drags the Q3 engine into the 21st century with the use of pretty pixel shaders. All image quality settings are maxed.

FarCry

This is a game that illustrates just how advanced PC graphics have become. With more DirectX 9 effects than a Microsoft graphics lab, it's also one of the more intensive games around. Which makes it a great benchmark! We test with all image quality settings maxed.

UT2K4

Considering the engine is a couple of years old, UT2K4's engine still looks mighty fine. It's not quite as demanding as FarCry, but it'll still give your GPU a bit of a lashing. As well as running this with all image quality settings maxed, it's also the game we use to test antialiasing and anisotropic filtering performance.

TEST BENCHES

Intel Test Bench (x2) Intel Pentium 4 2.6C

HIS RADEON X800 PRO
www.akatech.com.au

Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL
DDR400
www.altech.com.au

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB
ATA100 Hard Drive
www.seagate.com

ABIT IS7 865PE motherboard
www.altech.com.au

TOPOWER 470W PSU
www.auspcmarket.com.au

Mitsubishi Diamond View
2115e 21" monitor
www.mitsubishi.com.au

Microsoft multimedia keyboard
and optical mouse
www.microsoft.com.au

Windows XP Professional
www.microsoft.com.au

AMD Test Bench (x1) AMD Athlon XP 2600+

HIS RADEON X800 PRO
www.akatech.com.au

Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL
DDR400
www.altech.com.au

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB
ATA100 Hard Drive
www.seagate.com

ABIT NF7-S
www.altech.com.au

TOPOWER 470W PSU
www.auspcmarket.com.au

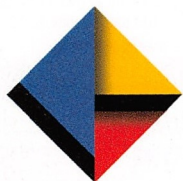
Mitsubishi Mitsubishi Diamond
View 2115e 21" monitor
www.mitsubishi.com

Microsoft multimedia keyboard
and optical mouse
www.microsoft.com.au

Windows XP Professional
www.microsoft.com.au

Image Quality testing:

We also use a Sony G520 21" CRT monitor for the image quality testing of video cards.



www.akatech.com.au



www.corsairmicro.com



www.auspcmarket.com.au



www.intel.com



www.abit.com.tw



www.amd.com



www.seagate.com



www.hightech.com.hk



www.altech.com.au



www.sony.com.au



MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC AUSTRALIA

www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

James Bannan

Decrypt

Hacking, the black arts, the underground... there's a totally different world buried within the random, shifting layers of dummy IP addresses, multi-layered anonymity and servers with enough security to house government secrets. In this issue, we trawl the DeCrypt net through these murky depths.

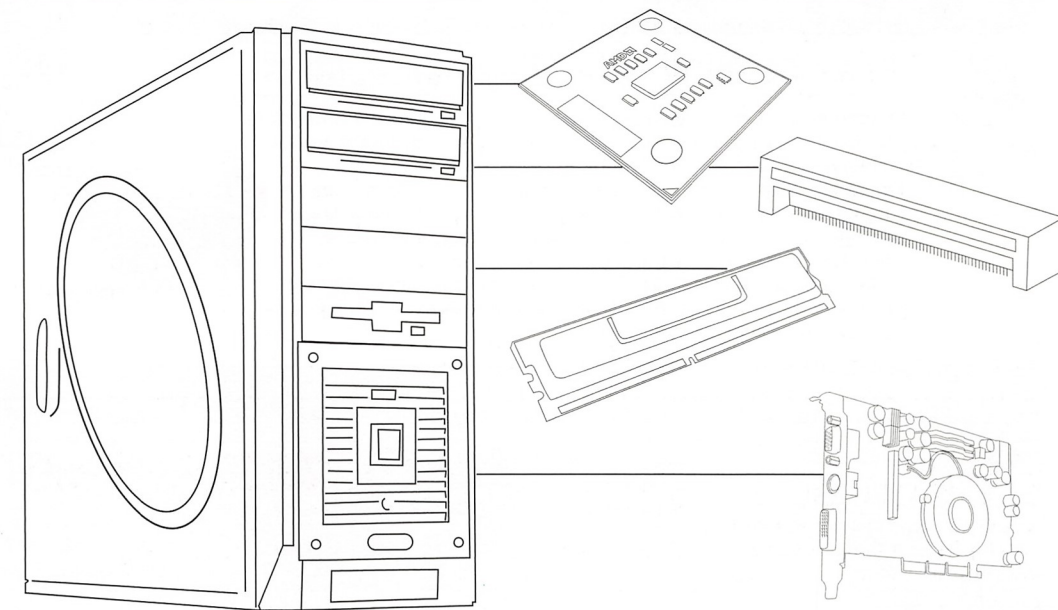
0-day 0-day (or zero-day) information is whatever is brand-new on the scene, and not common knowledge. The name comes from the value of the data – as soon as it's found, it's at zero time and therefore at its most valuable. The value of the 0-day data or program drops exponentially each day, as more and more people (especially the non-hacker types) get their hands on it. With 0-day security exploits, once a vendor gets the information, it's worthless.

Active attack Not a passive attack. OK, not enough info, huh? An active attack is any kind of hacking attempt designed to achieve a given aim – denial of service, breakin, data theft, whatever. Passive attacks just sit back and monitor information, or “packet-sniff”.

Alias Jennifer Garner... mmm. Although in the world of computer geeks, she only features as desktop wallpaper! Otherwise, an alias is any piece of information which relates to something else – DNS (name) alias for a server, email alias for internet-vs-intranet email addresses, or simply your Hotmail pseudonym.

Back Orifice What a charming name. So descriptive. Such imagery. Back Orifice (a pun on Microsoft's Back Office), was a remote access trojan released in 1998 by cDc (Cult of the Dead Cow). It became the standard format for all trojan-type hacks.

Black Hat A “bad” hacker. One who hacks for personal gain, destruction of data or some other malicious end. The opposite of a White Hat, who is a hacker



employed by industry to track down security holes and perform stress testing and penetration testing on corporate systems. The only real difference between them is that White Hats get paid mega-bucks and don't get to share a cell with a large man named Bubba.

DoS Denial-of-service. This is where a service, any kind of service, gets targeted with the aim of preventing it from working properly. A common kind of DoS attack is to target a remote server and flood it with useless information, preventing valid users from accessing mail, web or FTP services.

Island hopping A more civilised form of pub-crawling. Just kidding. Island-hopping is where hackers take over unprotected servers or other network nodes like workstations, and use them to stage attacks on other points. This has the advantage of masking the true source of the attack. With the popularity of high-speed home internet connections, unprotected home computers are very popular

island targets. The name is taken from the US military's campaigns in the Pacific, whereby they took over an island and used it as a base to attack the next one.

Logic bomb No, it's not just a buzzword from Swordfish, it really is a factual term. This is where a piece of malicious code is set to activate at a particular time. There was a popular theory that Y2K engineers left logic bombs behind so that they were still in business once the clocks ticked over.

Rootkit Hacker utilities left on a UNIX-based system after it's been compromised. These usually consist of applications which elevate privileges of certain accounts to root status, password sniffers, replacements for core binaries and backdoor programs. They usually are dropped onto the system by TFTP, or a similar transfer standard, so removing unnecessary file/network services is a good start to strengthening a UNIX system.

Script kiddy A know-nothing, sniveling pubescent with an internet

handle like C0d3G0D or gR8shAg, a handful of precoded hacks and as much practical hacking knowledge as a receptionist. In other words, not a serious hacker. Someone who's pretty behind the scene, and expects things to just “work”. Someone who should be bitch-slapped, but no-one can work up the energy to do it.

Tiger Team A team of white hats, employed to attack systems, and then give recommendations on securing it. In general, they start with a greater knowledge of the target system, and they're also able to use brute-force attacks which many black hats wouldn't employ, so there is an argument that an attack by a tiger team isn't real-world, and shouldn't be taken as the ultimate security test.

War dialing A method of hacking made popular by the movie War Games, where a hacker dials a range of numbers, just to see what picks up. Many workstations within organisations, and even some servers, have unsecured modems attached, an easy method of access.



XtremeOverclockers

Viper1337- CPU: Pentium4 800Mhz FSB - 3.0Ghz at 3.5Ghz
18" UMAX TelevisionTFT. Case, K/Board, Mouse: Thermaltake Lanfire
Asus Radeon 9800XT 256mb. Modem, Speakers, DVD Combo Burner
Ram: Corsair Twin-X DDR PC3200 512mb Low Lat. Kit. Win XP-Pro
HDD: Dual 80GB SATA Drives in Raid-0, 160GB Superfast Retrieval.
Asus P4C800DXE. Gamers Dream PC, Built by serious Gamers.

COBRA- CPU: Pentium4 800Mhz FSB-2.8Ghz at 3.3Ghz
DVD-BURNER. Asus Mainboard P4P800. 15" UMAX TFT Monitor
512MB DDR RAM(Dual Channel). 80GB S-ATA Hard Drive.
X-SONIC Cobra Case, Deluxe K/Board, Mouse and Speakers.
256MB Radeon 9600XT Video Card. Win XP and Bonus Games
Pack.

Go even faster, Water Cooling Available!

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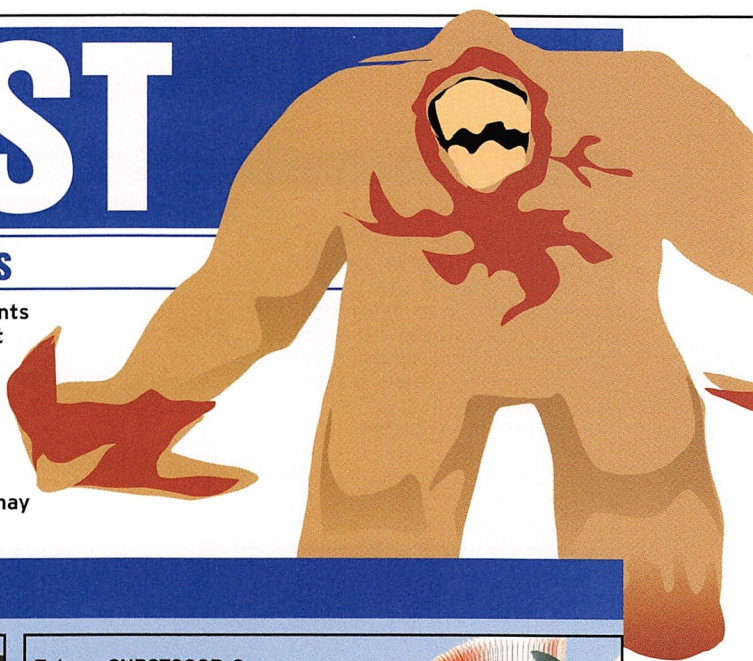
THE BEAST



In association with Altech Computers

Welcome to PCPP's Beast page, where we give you the blueprints for three very different PCs, each catering to a different wallet thickness and/or level of technical knowledge.

For those with extra phat, well padded money holders, look no further than the Beast. You'll be hard pressed to find a faster machine, but you'll pay through the nose for the privilege. Then there's the Mutant, for those who don't mind a bit of tinkering and overclocking. It offers the best balance between price and performance. Finally we have the Beastie. Cheap it may be, but slow it certainly is not.



CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

AMD Athlon FX-53 CPU

Goodbye Intel, hello AMD. The FX-53 is bloody expensive, but the fact that it's the fastest gaming processor around meant we had no choice but to fit out The Beast with this speed demon.

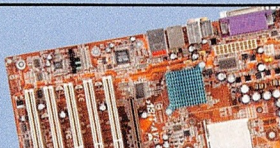
\$1449 www.amd.com



Abit AV8

We've now found a home for the FX-53 at half the cost of the last one. Not bad considering it'll perform just as quickly. Chock full of overclocking goodness, just in case you think an FX-53 is slow.

\$230 www.abit.com.tw



1GB Corsair TWINX1024-3200XLP

It's all about low latency baby. Unlike DDR2, this stuff is happy to cruise along at a blazing 2-2-2-5 speed. Lightspeed here we come.

\$625 www.corsairmemory.com



Zalman CNPS7000B-Cu

The Beast is so chunky, so wild and untameable that you need a real man's cooler stuck on the top of your mighty CPU. Zalman delivers, offering a chunk of metal that performs well and isn't too screamingly loud.

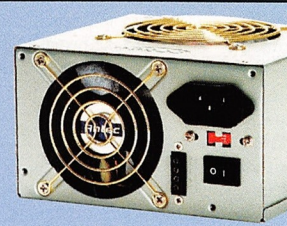
\$85 www.zalman.co.kr



Antec TruePower 550W

With 550 watts of blistering power you can plug in as many crazy case fans, cooling systems and front-mounted LCD panels as you like and still enjoy smooth, reliable gaming.

\$192 www.antec-inc.com

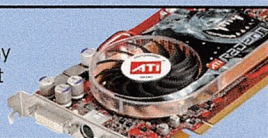


VIDEO, AUDIO AND CONNECTIVITY

Abit RX800XT RADEON X800XT

A grand just for the video card? Hey, if it was any cheaper we'd have our readers complaining that it's not beast-worthy.

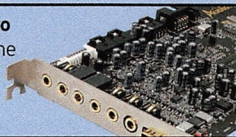
\$990 www.abit.com.tw



Creative Soundblaster Audigy 2 ZS Platinum Pro

The most powerful consumer-level soundcard on the market. Support for every sound format, including Dolby 6.1 surround.

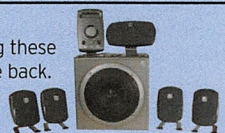
\$479 australia.creative.com



Logitech Z680

Let your soundcard handle all the decoding and plug these Power Award winning speakers into the ports on the back. You've never heard PC speakers like these.

\$699 www.logitech.com

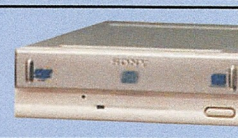


STORAGE AND OPTICAL

Sony DRU700A Dual Layer

Dual Layer burning is the way of the future. Not only does it allow for wads of storage, we can now backup our DVD collection without compression.

\$249 www.sony.com.au



Sony 16x DVD-ROM

It's straight up and down, it's cheap, it's fast, it works well and you need it to copy - sorry, back up - DVDs using your nifty writer.

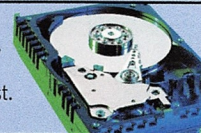
\$60 www.sony.com.au



2x Western Digital 74GB Raptor WD740D RAID 0

Sure, they're not the biggest hard drives on the planet, but they're arguably the fastest. And with a name like Raptor, it's obvious they were created just for our Beast.

\$780 www.westerndigital.com



DISPLAY, INPUT AND COSMETICS

17" Samsung 172x

It's might only be a 17" monitor, but it has the viewable area of a 19" CRT, at a fraction of the size. Blurring is a thing of the past due to the 12ms response time.

\$999 www.samsung.com.au



Antec P160

This beast of a case is perfect for a beast of a PC. A couple of temperature gauges on the front make it perfect for letting you know when your system is about to explode.

\$235 www.antec-inc.com



MS Wireless Optical Elite Desktop Pack

Keyboards and mice don't get much snazzier than this delectable combo.

\$170 www.microsoft.com.au



Panasonic PT-AE500E

Who needs a piddly monitor when this baby will throw a high resolution (1280 x 720) image 2.5m wide across the closest wall? The ultimate gaming experience.

\$3,899 www.panasonic.com.au



BEAST VALUE:

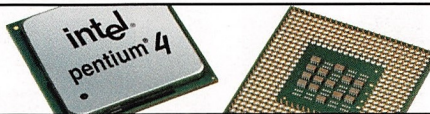
\$11441

THE MUTANT

Thanks to the popularity of overclocking and tweaking, we've included this machine to show you exactly what you can get away with for a very reasonable price. Tweaked to within an inch of its life, this is the machine we DO own, versus the Beast, which is the machine we'd like to be able to AFFORD to own.

Intel P4 2.8GHz "C" at 3.3GHz

This speedy little processor has the benefit of being overclockable to around the 3.3GHz mark at least. Hyperthreading support is a treat.
\$316 www.intel.com



Abit A17

An 865PE based mobo from Abit, the A17 has a very handy feature in that you can overclock your system directly from the Windows desktop. Which means you needn't delve into the confusing BIOS options ever again.
\$182 www.abit.com.tw



MS Wireless Optical Elite Desktop Pack

Sure, this combo isn't exactly cheap, but you can't skimp on the interface between you and your box of love. And it's all wireless, making it perfect to use from the comfort of your couch.
\$170 www.microsoft.com.au



Antec NeoPower 480

What could be groovier than a PSU that comes customisable cables, thus lessening the airflow destroying clutter we're used to in the past? Nothing, that's what.
\$192 www.antec-inc.com



Antec SUPERLANBOY

An excellent pre-modded case, with more than enough fan mounts to keep your oc'd system nice and chillin'. And with this machine, you'll definitely make the most of the side window.
\$165 www.antec-inc.com



1GB Corsair TWINX-3200C2

Damn memory is getting cheap. Who'd have thought a year ago that you could now pick up a gig of ridiculously fast DDR-RAM for a mere \$377? Not us, that's for sure.
\$416 www.corsairmemory.com



ELSA FAKCIX X80 Pro 256MB

Amusingly, the video card is the single most expensive component of the Mutant. We've made the move up to the new X800 Pro chipsets, as the 9800XT has been phased out.
\$750 www.elsa.com.tw



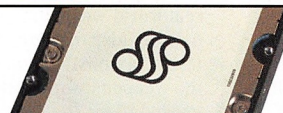
Zalman VGA Heatpipe Cooler 80C-HP

Bolt this mighty thing to your video card, attach the included fan, and who knows what insane core speeds you can achieve?
\$68 www.zalman.co.kr



120GB Seagate IDE

The first upgrade HDD I ever bought was 6GB and cost \$447. So this is pretty damn cheap. Only standard IDE, but at this price we can't complain.
\$146 www.seagate.com



Creative SB Audigy LS

Lacks a few of the features found on the Audigy 2, but only the ones that don't really have much effect on gaming. There's a lot of soundcard here for not much cost.
\$109 australia.creative.com



Creative Inspire 5.1 5200

They're so cheap they're good enough for the Mutant. No decoder, no difficult optical inputs, just ordinary wires plugging in to a set of extraordinary speakers.
\$147 australia.creative.com



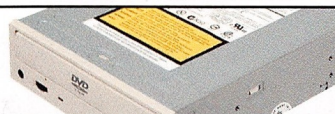
Sony Internal 8X DVD+/-RW Drive

This single layer DVD burner is fast, dependable and has a slightly funkier facade than most of the beige monstrosities currently available.
\$185 www.sony.com.au



Sony 16X DVD-ROM

Wow, these things sure got cheap didn't they? Now you've got no excuse not to subscribe to PCPP's DVD edition. Backup all your digital LAN shots for posterity. Pose nude... no wait, don't.
\$60 www.sony.com.au



19" Samsung 957 Dynafat

Cheaper than the video card but still a lot of sleek, flat monitor. Nineteen inches is pretty much the minimum for decent gaming, and we can't wait until a 16ms LCD this big costs this much.
\$499 www.samsung.com.au



4x Antec Internal Illuminate

Pep up the Mutant with a few light sticks. Stick 'em on the monitor, in the case, wherever you like. USB powered and respond to sound - clap on, clap off! Other cosmetic additions to the Creature are limited only by your imagination..
\$176 www.antec-inc.com



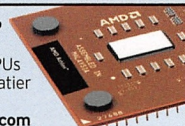
MUTANT VALUE: \$3581

the beastie

The cheapest but worthiest PC of all, the Beastie is for all of us who need gaming, the web and to generally have fun without worrying about overclocking or our bank account.

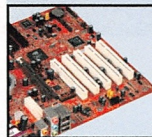
AMD -Athlon XP 2600+ Barton

The cheapest CPUs keep getting meatier and meatier
\$157 www.amd.com



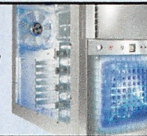
Abit NF7-S

nForce2 is good and this implementation of it is even better
\$165 www.abit.com.tw



Antec SuperLanboy

Includes a 350W power supply, window and carry strap.
\$225 www.antec-inc.com



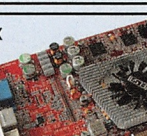
512MB Corsair PC-3200

A budget PC with half a gig of RAM. All praise the open market.
\$186 www.corsairmemory.com



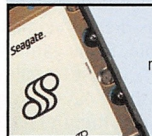
Elsa FALCOX 980FX

Yes, a 9800 Pro in a budget system. Holy shit batman.
\$430 www.elsa.com.tw



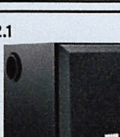
80GB Seagate IDE

Plenty of room for not much cash. Dependable and reliable.
\$115 www.seagate.com



Creative Inspire 2500 2.1

Plug 'em in to the nForce2's onboard sound and it's MP3-tastic!
\$89 australia.creative.com



Sony 16X DVD-ROM

Good enough for all the PCs on this page, swift and reliable.
\$60 www.samsung.com.au



Sony Internal 8X DVD+/-RW Drive

Cheap, fast, reliable, what more could you want from a DVD burner?
\$185 www.samsung.com.au



17" Samsung 753DFX

To think 17" monitors were once worth \$800. I love the technology of the future.
\$229 www.samsung.com.au



Black Microsoft Optical Value Pack

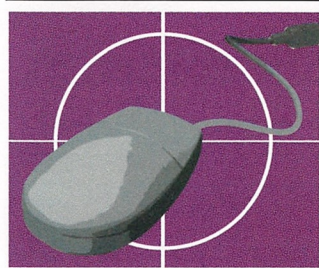
Not content with owning your OS world, MS are now ruling the I/O roost.
\$55 www.kmepc.com



beastie value: \$1950

So, you want one of these three fine machines? Luckily, all of these components are available at
Altech Computers
www.altech.com.au
02 9735 5655





The Hub

YOUR ONLINE GAMING SERVER

Hosted by Eliot Fish

We're all Doomed

It's make or break time for modders

Are you infected? The first real signs of this disease appeared when the demo of Deus Ex: Invisible War hit the internet. To put it into a few small words, gamers complained that it just "wasn't realistic enough". People complained that you: a) couldn't realistically reload; b) couldn't get accurately realistic reactions from AI; c) didn't have realistic ammo types, and... blah blah blah. The "Realism Disease", as it shall be named, had well and truly got hold. Some gamers had forgotten that games - whilst introducing more visual realism these days - aren't meant to be simulations of real life. In fact, games are meant to be an escapism from reality.

True complete freedom is not the answer to amazing gameplay. Not at all. Look at Mario - you're restricted to constant linear movement to the right and can only jump. Mario can't go back the way he came. He can't even stop to smell the flowers. But it's brilliant. Throw the goddamn logic and simulation of real life out the window.

Whilst the Realism Disease has affected some game developers (you only need look to the number of brain-numbingly dull World War games that push to simulate more than entertain), it thankfully didn't infect one of the world's best game developers, id Software.

Doom 3 is a reminder of how entertaining PC games - most notably the first person shooter - can be, by a pure application of imagination to game design without needing to cripple it with realism. Doom 3 is outrageously fantastical - many parts of it

make very little sense - but gee, it sure is FUN. And now we get to the whole point of this article.

The Mod community have started doing all sorts of interesting things with Doom 3 - in fact, it only took a couple of days for the first mod to hit the internet. The problem is, it seems that some sections of the Mod community have been zombified by the Realism Disease.

Unbelievably, there is a Doom 3 "Chaingun FIX mod" that promises to "make the Doom 3 chaingun act more like a real life chaingun". When we're talking about the legions of Hell invading a base on Mars, do we really need perfect simulations of real world weapons? Did this modder not consider that id Software designed, tested (extensively) and ensured that the weapons worked the way they needed to for the game to function as it should? It's as ludicrous as a Mario "Jumping FIX mod" to "make Mario jump at more realistic heights", completely fuxoring the gameplay in the process. And then there's the "Semi-Auto Pistol mod" which "modifies your pistol to act like a real semi-automatic pistol". Real. Everything must be realistic. Must... eat brains! Blaaarrghh!

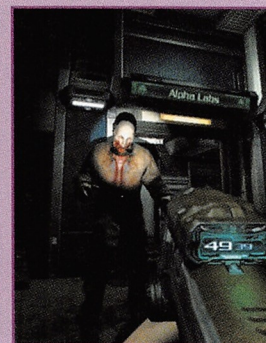
Okay, but seriously, it's not all bad. There are some crazy and even useful Doom 3 mods available too. Check them out...



DUCT TAPE

It's borderline Realism Disease, but the Duct Tape mod is a small Doom 3 hack that sticks a flashlight on the shotgun and machinegun. The author, Glen 'FrenZon' Murphy, was smart enough to keep the light "narrower than a standard flashlight, and only available on the basic weapons... in order to preserve the atmosphere. The pistol is not equipped with a flashlight, so as not to spoil the early sections of the game". Bravo. All you need do is unpack the file to your 'base' directory. Murphy promises to add a toggle so that the flashlight can be turned on and off too.

For: Doom 3 **Version:** 0004 **URL:** <http://ducttape.glenmurphy.com> **Size:** 21KB



WHEN IT'S DONE

SOME RATHER AMBITIOUS DOOM 3 MODS (AND TOTAL CONVERSIONS) ARE CURRENTLY IN DEVELOPMENT. HERE ARE A SELECTION.

Creature Conversion

URL: <http://www.freewebs.com/doom3convert/>
Adds the original Doom creatures into Doom 3 in full 3D.

Doom 3 Co-op

URL: <http://coop.doom3maps.de/>
Co-op play will be implemented for two-players to complete the single player game together.

Dragonball Last Bout

URL: <http://www.dblb.net/>
A Dragonball Z total conversion for Doom 3.

Dungeon Keeper Mod

URL: <http://www.dkmod.tn-uk.net/>
These guys are remaking Dungeon Keeper with the Doom 3 engine.

AlienCulture

URL: <http://www.alienculture.net/>
A single-player "sci-fi themed" (read: Alien inspired) total conversion of Doom 3.

Facility

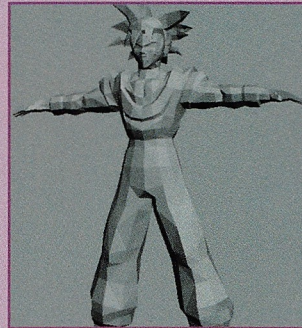
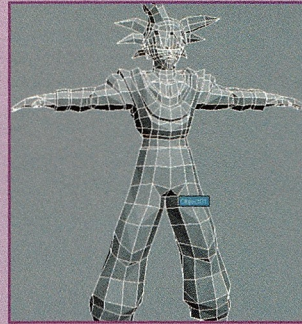
URL: <http://retinalexperiments.co.nr/>
A single-player mod that looks to put the Doom 3 gameplay in more familiar Earthly locations.

Tech

URL: <http://retinalexperiments.co.nr/>
From the folks behind Facility, this is a single level mod that pits you against 3 new monsters. Designed "just to scare you".

Trench Rats

URL: <http://www.warwickmedia.com/>
A World War I total conversion for Doom 3.



PLENTY MORE DOOM AND GLOOM

1

OLD SCHOOL DOOM SOUND PACK

Size: 6.6MB
URL: www.fileplanet.com/download.aspx?f=144021

Replaces the majority of Doom 3 sounds with monster and weapon sounds from the original Doom games.

2

ENHANCED DOOM V.O.2A

Size: 2.4MB
URL: www.fileplanet.com/files/140000/144059.shtml

This mod tweaks various sounds, physics and textures to make Doom 3 even more "in yo face", without messing with the game mechanics.

3

ULTRA EXTREME QUALITY MOD

Size: 250KB
URL: www.fileplanet.com/files/140000/143958.shtml

This graphics mod for Doom 3 enables self-shadowing on every monster and character for even higher quality visuals.

4

VARILIGHT 1.1

Size: 58.1KB
URL: www.fileplanet.com/files/140000/144054.shtml

Similar to the Duct Tape mod, except it varies the strength of light on each weapon and adds a laser sight to the pistol.



FLARES

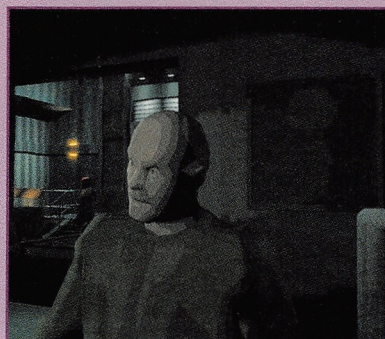
Changes grenades into flares, so that you can illuminate dark areas for a short period of time. The author, Jason 'Rodzilla' Rodzik, created the mod as an alternative to the flashlight hack in the idea that there's more danger and tension in only being able to throw flares (that illuminate the environment as they travel through the air, too) that only burn for a limited time.

For: Doom 3 Version: 1.0 URL: <http://staff.seriouszone.com/rodzilla/doom3> Size: 6.26KB

CEL SHADER

Isn't it amazing just how small these downloads are? For only 5KB, you can get Cel Shader, a bizarre mod that turns Doom 3 into a cartoonish cel-shaded experience. It uses a custom shader algorithm written by Junkguy to give it its unique comic book look. Cel Shader requires a GeForce FX or Radeon 9500 or higher.

For: Doom 3 Version: 1.0 URL: www.junkguy.tk Size: 5KB



BUILD UP OF STEAM

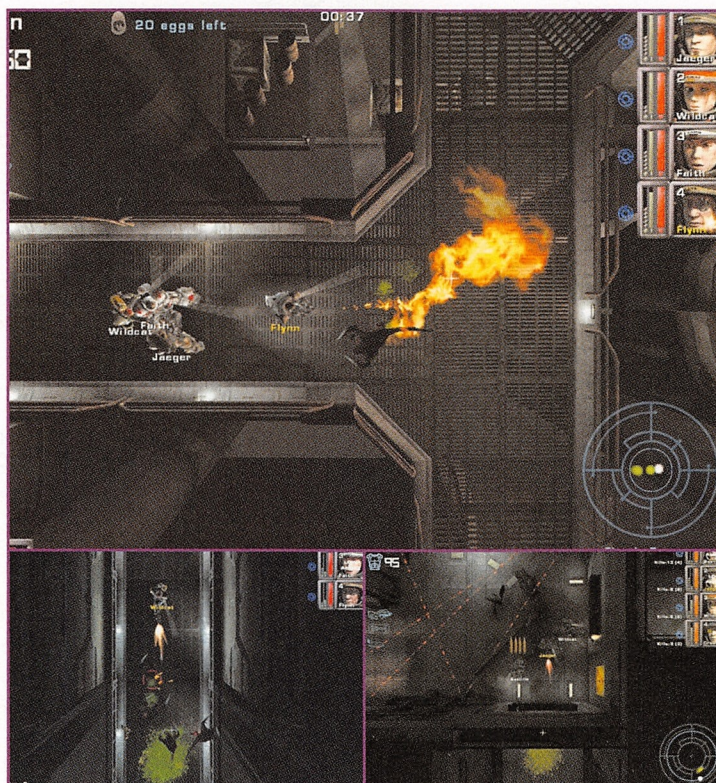
Valve's Gabe Newell has confirmed that the Steam client will now allow for pre-loading of Half-Life 2 content. That is, log on to your Steam account and you can start downloading assets ("textures, audio and other stuff that doesn't change") that you'll need to play Half-Life 2 if you plan on buying it (or redeeming a coupon) and downloading it via the Steam service. As these assets will become available before the full game is released, it will be interesting to see what can be cannibalised by the Half-Life 2 mod community ahead of time. Oh and if you want to know which Australian Cybercafes are running the Counter-Strike Source Beta, then check out the listing here: www.steampowered.com/?area=cafe_directory&country=AU

SUPERHERO FUTURE

In the wake of the first major update to City of Heroes "Through the Looking Glass", the Cryptic dev team have further plans for adding more depth to missions and the game world. New goals will be added to missions as well as some specific AI tweaks to bosses so that missions are more interactive and immersive. New character archetypes will also soon be introduced, including some that may be less combat oriented. Oh, and finally capes, along with two new zones and new villain groups, will be added in the next update due in September. Meanwhile, City of Villains is not due until 2005.

Alien Swarm

For: UT2004 Version: 1.1 URL: <http://www.blackcatgames.com/swarm/> Size: 108MB Score: 5/5



Alien Swarm is a tactical squad-based shooter that uses the UT2K4 engine, but with a classic RTS overhead view! Inspired by the Alien films, this is a technically impressive total conversion that even utilises Epic's installer to apply the mod for you. The game supports 1-8 players in co-operative play mode, with players being able to choose from four marine classes: Explosives, Special Weapons, Medic and Technical. As you play through the campaign, your character even acquires experience and skills, making the characters that survive each level even more important to the success of the mission. Players need each other's skills to succeed; for example, only one player might be able to hack you past security doors and another able to heal you up after a fire fight. The aliens attack you in typical fashion, even infecting some of your teammates and eventually hatching from inside your buddies just like in Alien. Equipment you can utilise to fry the bugs include Shotguns, Flamethrowers, Incendiary mines, Flares, Assault Rifles, Sentry Guns and more. Mission objectives may include seeking out and destroying an alien nest, or search and rescue missions, all through typically dark and spooky abandoned facilities. A very cool - and highly recommended - bug hunt.

Shattered Oasis

For: UT2004 Version: 2.20 URL: www.shatteredoasis.com/ Size: 246MB Score: 3/5



Post apocalyptic scenarios tickle your trigger finger? Shattered Oasis is set on the premise that anarchy rules and resources are extremely limited in this alternate reality to our current day. The game offers a variety of game modes, from Arena (a fast-paced one-on-one deathmatch), Team Deathmatch, standard Deathmatch and Detonation (similar to Counter-Strike's bomb mode). The spin is that there are two main cultures that are struggling for power: the Compounders, who attempted to live in secluded harmony by locking out the real world; and the Variants, a hive of scum and villainy who do whatever it takes to survive. The setting is reminiscent of the dilapidated cities of Fallout or the Tatooine wastelands of Star Wars.

Naturally, the mod features all-new weapons, such as the Scatterer (a deadly melee weapon), the BFR (a more powerful assault rifle with frag grenade alt. fire), and variations on the shottie and sniper rifle. There are also bizarre beasts of burden that make traversing the desert that much easier. Whilst the gameplay isn't currently that drastically different to any good old shooter deathmatch, more original game modes are planned for future patches. Shattered Oasis' current strength is the original and professional artwork and convincing atmosphere.



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ARRESTING CITIZENS

Citizen-132 is a remarkable looking total conversion in the works for Far Cry. The team had originally planned it for Half-Life 2, but inevitable delays had them switch to Crytech's engine so work could get underway. The mod plans to be a "horror" experience, complete with creepy experiments and mad scientists, inspired by the film 28 Days Later. Certainly, the quality of the artwork and the idea behind Citizen-132 looks almost better than the original Far Cry. You can read more about it here: www.citizen-132.com. Positions are still available on their 30+ team too...

DEVELOPMENT HELL?

DreamCatcher's awaited Painkiller expansion, Battle out of Hell, has been delayed until November, slipping from its early October release date. The expansion is set to enhance the multiplayer and single-player components of the game, with the multiplayer focus being new game modes, models and maps. The best part is that the Painkiller SDK is part of the expansion, so the mod community can finally start getting some cool work done. After it comes out in November, of course. We can't help but wonder if the release of Doom 3 and id Software's take on Hell gave them a few new ideas?

Heat of Battle

For: Call of Duty Version: 0.32 URL: <http://hob.mikesmarauders.com> Size: 44MB Score: 2/5



Can't get enough of Call of Duty? Heat of Battle might be the answer to your prayers. This multiplayer mod is essentially a Call of Duty teamplay pack, full of enhancements and cool new maps and tweaks. Heat of Battle attempts to bring even more World War realism to the Call of Duty experience, such as doing away with the crosshair and limiting the player to realistic amounts of ammo for what was possible to carry by soldiers in the real war – you even have to choose to carry only one rifle at any one time (the mod also introduces a whole range of new World War weapons). Other changes include a shellshock effect for grenade hits and pistol whippings, plus the implementation of realistic locational damage, so players will drop their weapons if they get shot in the hands and so forth.

The maps that come with the download are generally quite polished, although the quality of level design on offer is a real mixed bag. Worth a download if you're desperate to get your hands on something fresh for your copy of Call of Duty before United Offensive gets released.

Air Buccaneers

For: UT2004 Version: Beta 4.1 URL: <http://ludocraft.oulu.fi/airbuccaneers> Size: 169MB Score: 4/5

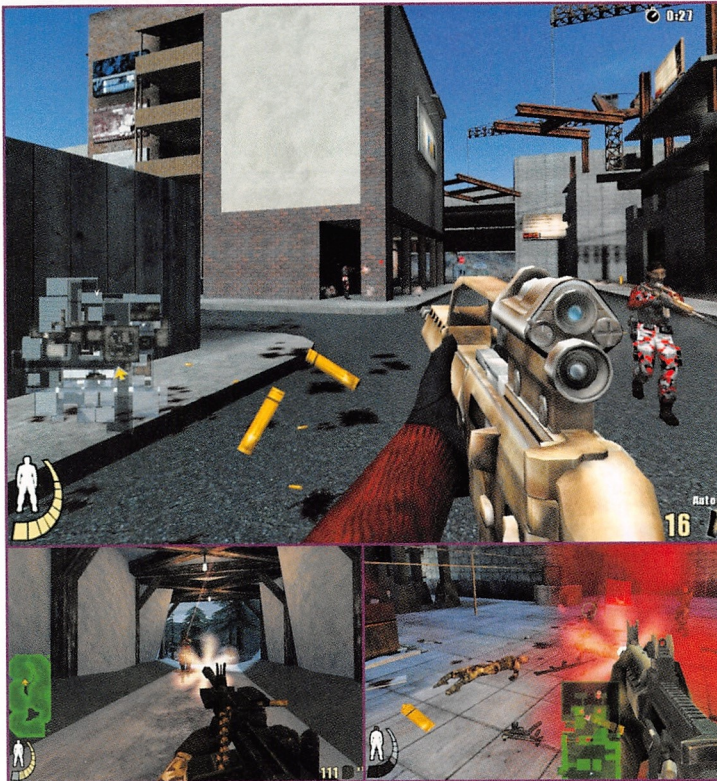


This is a total conversion, and a pretty darn original one at that. This totally transforms UT2K4 into a game about hot air balloon warfare between rival factions. Yes, balloon warfare. The game takes place in an ancient fantasy setting, with each hot air balloon equipped with a deadly cannon and a storage barrel for cannon balls. Steering your balloon about the place is harder than it looks, as your trajectory can be affected by wind turbulence and of course, attacks from enemy balloon riders. But riding in balloons isn't everything that this mod offers, as you can still get about on foot with your musket and sword, which is quite amusing. The mod, however, requires some very efficient teamplay to get the most out of it. You can't really just hoon about in your own balloon and succeed, as you need teammates to be using telescopes to understand what your opponent is doing, as a fair amount of tactics are needed to win the air battles. A nice twist is the Treasure Hunt mode, where you battle it out for rewards instead of frags! The maps too are excellent and Ludocraft have put together some very atmospheric locations.

Urban Terror



For: Quake III Arena Version: 3.7 URL: <http://www.urbanterror.net> Size: 442MB Score: 3/5



Helps to have a catchy name, yes? Urban Terror is a total conversion for those of you who still have a copy of Quake III Arena sitting around. It's in many ways like a version of Counter-Strike for the Quake engine, pitting teams against each other in urban environments with modern weapons and utilising game types such as Follow the Leader - where your team must protect a randomly selected member from death until the end of the round. Sound familiar? It is. There is an impressive selection of maps on hand with the download, and they're really quite effective with the "street war" vibe that developer, Silicon Ice, are obviously going for. Of course, the Quake 3 Arena engine doesn't look so hot anymore, and whilst a lot of hard work has gone into this mod, it certainly doesn't do anything to make the engine look better than it did when it came out.

If you don't have Half-Life (what's wrong with you?) and have never played Counter-Strike but have Quake 3 on the shelf, then you can't go wrong in checking out Urban Terror, because it'll give you almost the same kind of gameplay experience. Almost.

The Secret Diary of MMO Planetside

LINEAGE II - IT'S NOT EASY BEING EVIL Part 1

by George Soropos

My first day as one of the Warrior caste wasn't what I had expected. For one thing I found out that I have to wear a frock. When our Dark Elven ancestors discovered magical power to fight the humans, and were hence forth cast by the Gods into our evil bad guy role, the whole evil stereotype thing must have been quite different. These days a man in a dress doesn't immediately incite the kind of quivering, dribbling fear we dream about. I imagine that a bit of barely disguised snickering is the best we can hope for.

Once my training at the Temple of Shilen was complete and my trial quests behind me it was time to head back to the village. As I returned through the high mountain passes that had provided the backdrop for so much of my childhood mischief a chill wind reached up into my nether regions becoming an insistent reminder of my current trouser situation. I made a vow then and there that no man or woman would get between me and the next pair of corduroy's I could find.

As I strode confidently back along main street the looks of recognition and of respectful acknowledgment of my achievement that I had expected, even longed for, were nowhere to be seen. It seems that even the ordinary townsfolk were evil! Why hadn't I noticed this before? One thing I was definitely noticing was the uniforms of the new female recruits. I hadn't seen any at the temple as they have a separate and much more rigorous training program which helps them master the art of wearing a full-body combat G string without having the whole thing disappear up their crack.

I went to see some of my old friends and made a detour to the tailor's only to find that even his cheapest togs were beyond my meager means. If I couldn't find a helpless old lady to mug here in town I was going to have to hunt for some treasure out in the wilds. I asked for directions to the nearest hunting ground, having been out of local circulation for a while, and was promptly ignored in true evil

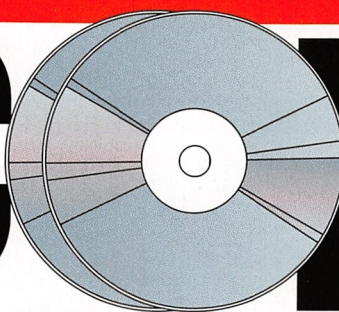


fashion. Feeling proud of my evil friends and neighbors for being so unaccommodating I set out to acquire some booty.

Weak little monsters were actually not that hard to find and most of them weren't even big enough to get their tentacles up

under my skirt, thank God. Once I had 'found' enough gold I returned with some excitement to the tailor's shop and flung my skirt onto his fire. Moments later I emerged a new elf. Now, with the family jewels firmly packed away, I was finally ready for some Evil!

THE DISC



REQUESTS

We welcome requests so please forward your requests to Disc Producer Amos Hong via email at cdgod@next.com.au or write to PCPP DVD Requests, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016



This month's disc is HUGE!! There are a total of 13 demos, 10 trailers, 11 mods, several patches and utilities, 1 anime episode and a FREE game.

The demos section includes some great games for you to try out. There are some great titles to try out like Rome: Total War and Myst 4: Revelations. Take charge of thousands of Roman soldiers as you crush your enemies on your way to being the Imperator. The demo for Myst 4 will take you on a short journey through the visually stunning world of Myst. There's also some chaotic action with the addictive racing game Mashed and Worms Fort: Under Siege.

This month they're a lot of Mods to wade through, especially if you're a Doom 3 fan. The disc also has mods for UT 2004 and Call of Duty. But back to Doom 3. If you've complained about the light in Doom

3, well you're in luck, because there's a mod that lets you tape a flashlight to your guns and also another mod lets you replace grenades with flares. Awesome.

Going along with the Doom 3 theme this month, there's also a Doom 3 trailer. For the people yet to play Doom 3, you'll get to have a look at what you are missing. For some hard-hitting action, check out the trailer for Madden 2005.

The Bunker as usual has some cool maps for all you gamers to try out on some of your favourite games. There are also a couple of new additions to the Utilities section, while the wallpaper section once again contains 10 new game wallpapers.

See ya 'till next month.

Amos Hong
Disc Master
cdgod@next.com.au

DVD CONTENTS

DEMOS

Armies of Exigo
Battle for Troy
Gish
Knights of the Temple: Infernal Crusade
Mashed
Myst IV Revelations
Codename: Panzers
Port Royale 2
Raging Tiger: The 2nd Korean War
Rome: Total War
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
"The Silver Earring"
Soldner: Secret Wars
Worms Fort: Under Siege

EXTRAS

Wolf's Rain [DVD Episode]
Need For Kill [Free Game]



TRAILERS

Armies of Exigo
Colin McRae Rally 2005
Doom 3
Madden 2005 "Fear the D"
Conflict: Vietnam
Star Wars Battlefront
Soldner: Secret Wars
SW KotOR II: the Sith Lords
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005
Victory '04 - Episode 3

PATCHES

BF:Vietnam 1.1.14
SC: Pandora Tomorrow 1.31 [Euro/Asia]
UT2004 v3270

MODS

Alien Swarm [UT 2004]
DeGeneration [RTCW]
Revolt [CoD]
Duct Tape [Doom 3]
Flare [Doom 3]
Cel Shader [Doom 3]
Old School Doom Sound Pack [Doom 3]
Enhanced Doom [Doom 3]
Ultra Extreme Quality [Doom 3]
VariLight [Doom 3]



BUNKER

Heaps more wallpaper, free games, Winamp skins, map packs and addon files for all your favourite games. Come get some!

UTILITIES

• Catalyst Radeon Display Driver 4.8.0.42 - f
• DirectX 9.0c - f

DivX Player (with DivX Codec) 5.2 - f

• nVidia ForceWare Graphics Driver 61.77 - f
Windows Media Player 9 - f
Winamp 5.03 - f
WinRAR 3.3 - s
WinZip 9.0 - s

WALLPAPERS

Thanks to the guys at GameWallpapers.com who have supplied us with wallpapers. This month we have wallpapers for games like City of Heroes, Myst4, Viewtiful Joe 2 and 25 to Life.

CD CONTENTS

CD 1

DEMOS

Gish
Mashed
Myst IV Revelations
Raging Tiger: The Second Korean War
Rome: Total War

TRAILERS

Colin McRae Rally 2005
Doom 3
SW KotOR II: the Sith Lords
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 200



CD2

DEMOS

Armies of Exigo
Codename: Panzers
Worms Fort: Under Siege

TRAILERS

Armies of Exigo
Star Wars Battlefront

MODS

Alien Swarm [UT 2004]
Duct Tape [Doom 3]
Flare [Doom 3]
Cel Shader [Doom 3]
Ultra Extreme Quality [Doom 3]
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NEXT
MONTH



One RTS to rule them all





Cursed, cursed, cursed

And thrice cursed is surely Doomed

Forgive me if this article at any point comes across as disjointed. I'm writing by night-vision from inside an elaborately constructed hide on the lee of some wind-blasted hill in the Royal National Park because I'm hunting my crazy ex-third flatmate for sport.

To understand why, you must realise that in the first week of August, 2004, Doom 3 was released. Previous games, they had a release date and on that date they came out. Doom 3 was a little different, because Activision only gave us the enticingly ephemeral "Week of August 2" as the release date, ensuring that legions of screaming - or at least, creepily sweating - teens would mob EBs across the nation every morning for five days.

Here's how it went for me (notes taken from my famous little blue book, which, after the now infamous Week of August 2, now looks somewhat the worse for wear):

Monday August 2:

0530h: Wake to the boots drumming a tattoo on the bed-end that seems to say "doomthreetodaydoomthreetoday" - I've slept in my clothes so I can get out the door in record time. Need coffee.

0730h: Still looking for coffee. Burwood Westfield is packed with guys who look like they've slept in their clothes. So much for my theory of coming halfway across the city to find an EB that won't get mobbed.

0930h: EB store manager arrives. He looks refreshed. He's carrying a coffee. He opens up and casually remarks that Doom 3 isn't out today.

0932h: Mob trashes the store.

Tuesday August 3:

0545h: Wake to the boots kicking the doona off so the cold bite of the winter's morning will get me up all the sooner. I've slept in my shirt and boots, but took my pants off for greater comfort.

0550h: Hurt self struggling pants on over boots, fall down stairs into exciting executive sunken lounge of parent's Balmain flat.

0800h: Pay ridiculous price for coffee at Chatswood Chase, then go across the road to the newish EB in Westfield. Sweaty mob wearing slightly more expensive clothes. Some appear to have put a fresh shirt on.

0930h: EB store manager arrives looking harried. He shouts that John Carmack is out in the street signing autographed Doom 3 posters and while the mob is distracted, darts into the shop and bolts the door after him.

0937h: Mob comes back in off the street and trashes the store.

Wednesday August 4:

0630h: Wake sluggishly to blaring alarm and the boots somehow kicking me in the head. Terrible groin strain.

0800h: Wake again and fall out of bed to

grope around on floor for yesterday's clothes. Stagger to kitchen and drink four cups of instant coffee.

1030h: Slouch into the city to a little games shop I know over the back of Kent St to find smoking remains of store and store owner sitting in the gutter sobbing. "They were like animals!" he says. "They voided their bowels in my cash register!"

Thursday August 5:

0630h: Asleep

0730h: Still asleep. Boots can kick me all they like, I ain't getting up to go look at a shop that isn't selling Doom 3

0800h - 1230h: Sleep through the worst software-related riots in Australian history. Don't see kids firebombing EB stores from Penrith to Caringbah. Don't see a crowd waving rolled up copies of PCPP#103 (with the Doom 3 review in it) marching on Activision headquarters. Don't see Activision PR shock trooper Kirsty Shepherd standing on top of an armoured car throwing copies of Doom 3 into the crowd in an attempt to

somehow turn its anger on itself. Don't see ambush of truck convoy on Eastern Distributor and gamers cracking open the doors to strip pallets of Doom 3 bare in mere seconds.

1500h: Get up, eat breakfast, go back to bed.

Friday August 6:

1145h: Walk through the shattered streets of Sydney, past burnt out cars and craters, past gamers lying in alleyways clutching charred Doom 3 posters and giggling insanely.

1210h: Go into Revolution and buy second hand copy of Doom 3 for \$69.95. Note someone has written in the CD sleeve that the game "suxors".

1430h: Finally get home after nightmare CityRail experience only to find crazy ex-third flatmate has broken into the house and swapped my Radeon 9800 for his old TNT2. Barely legible handwritten note promises he will return the card after he's "played Doom 3."

1432h: Calmly go to wardrobe and get high-powered hunting rifle with telescopic sight. The Week of August 2. Lest we forget.



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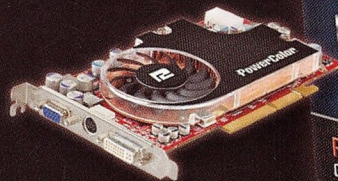
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